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Ed Sheeran.

Seriously.

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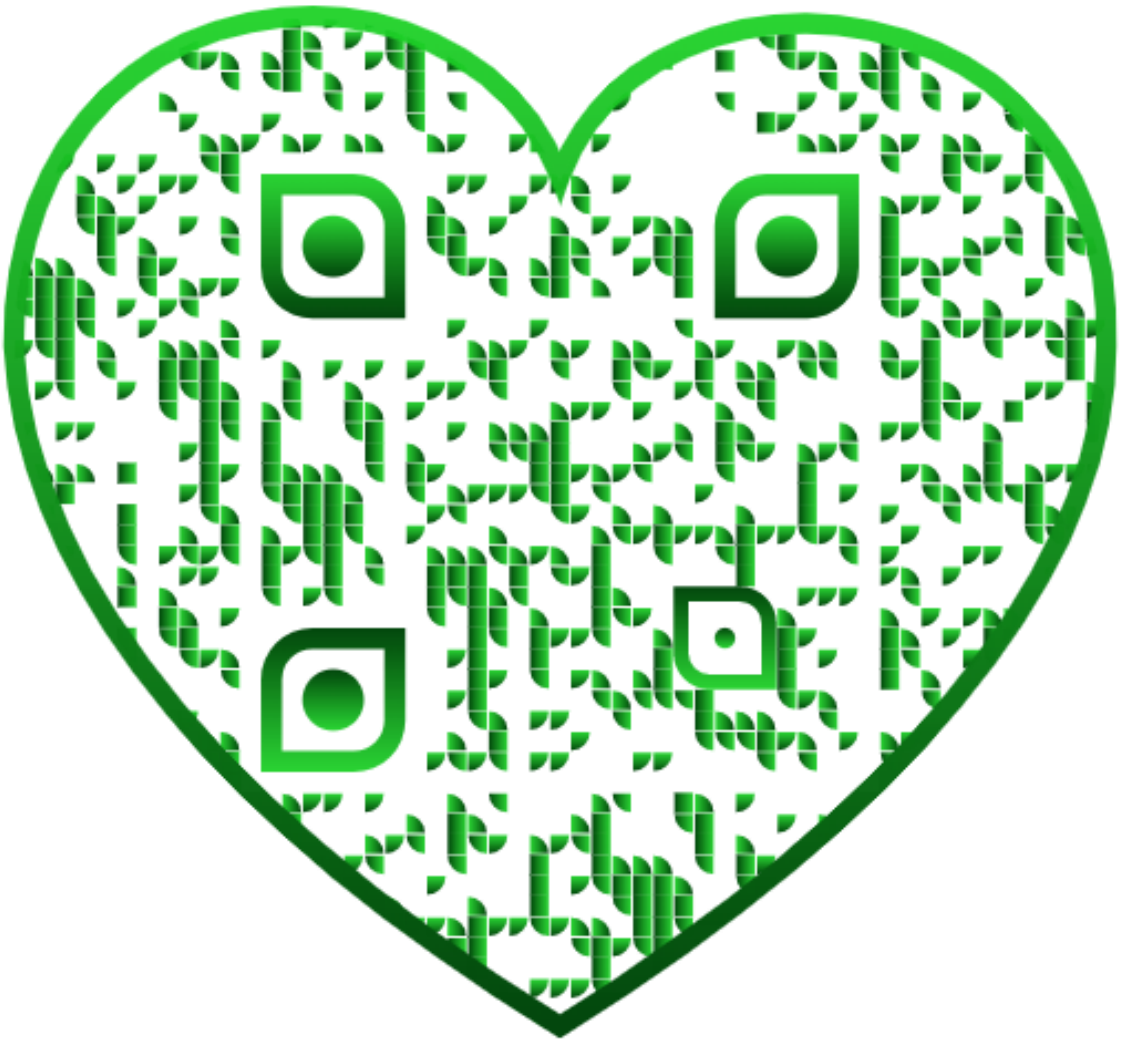

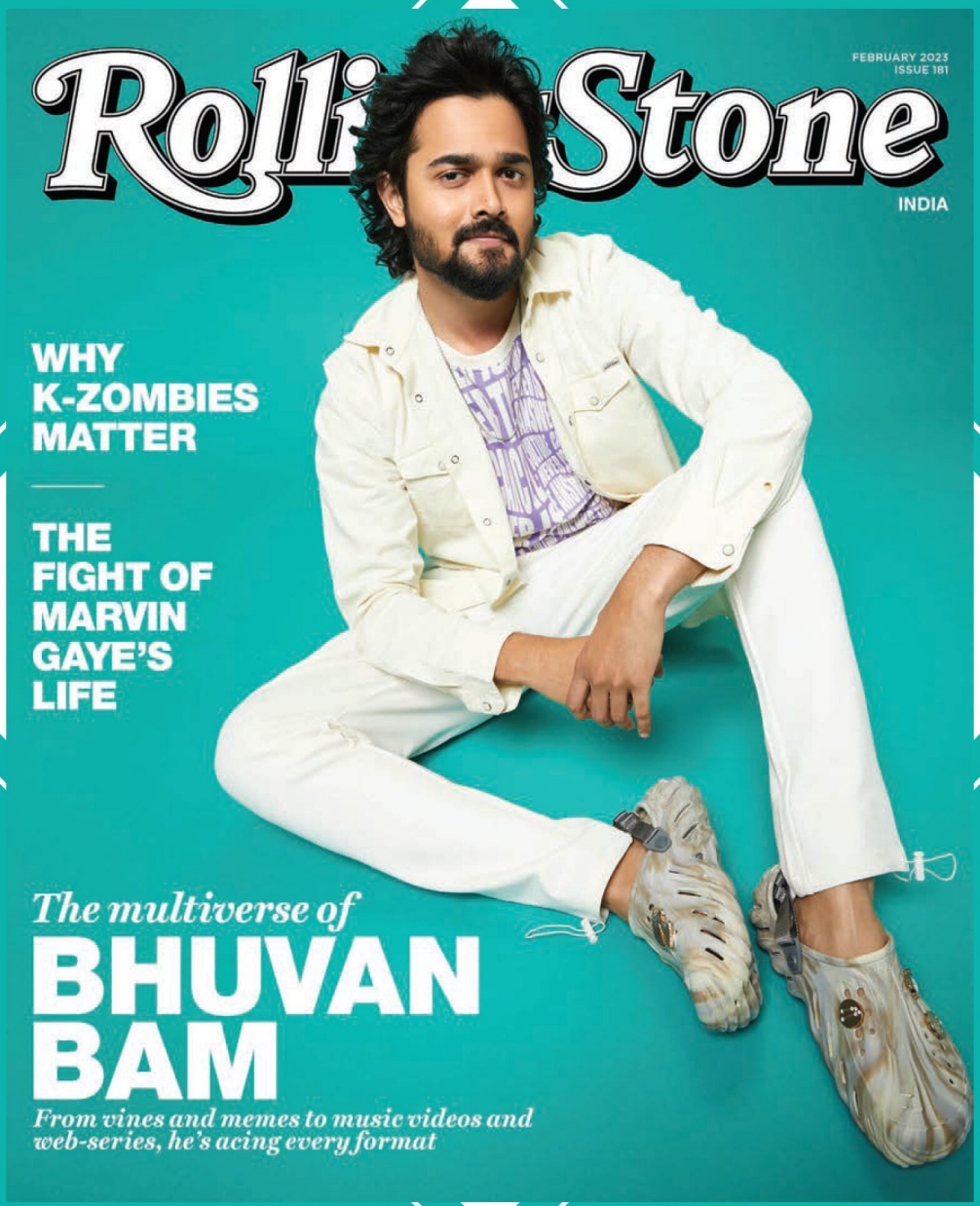

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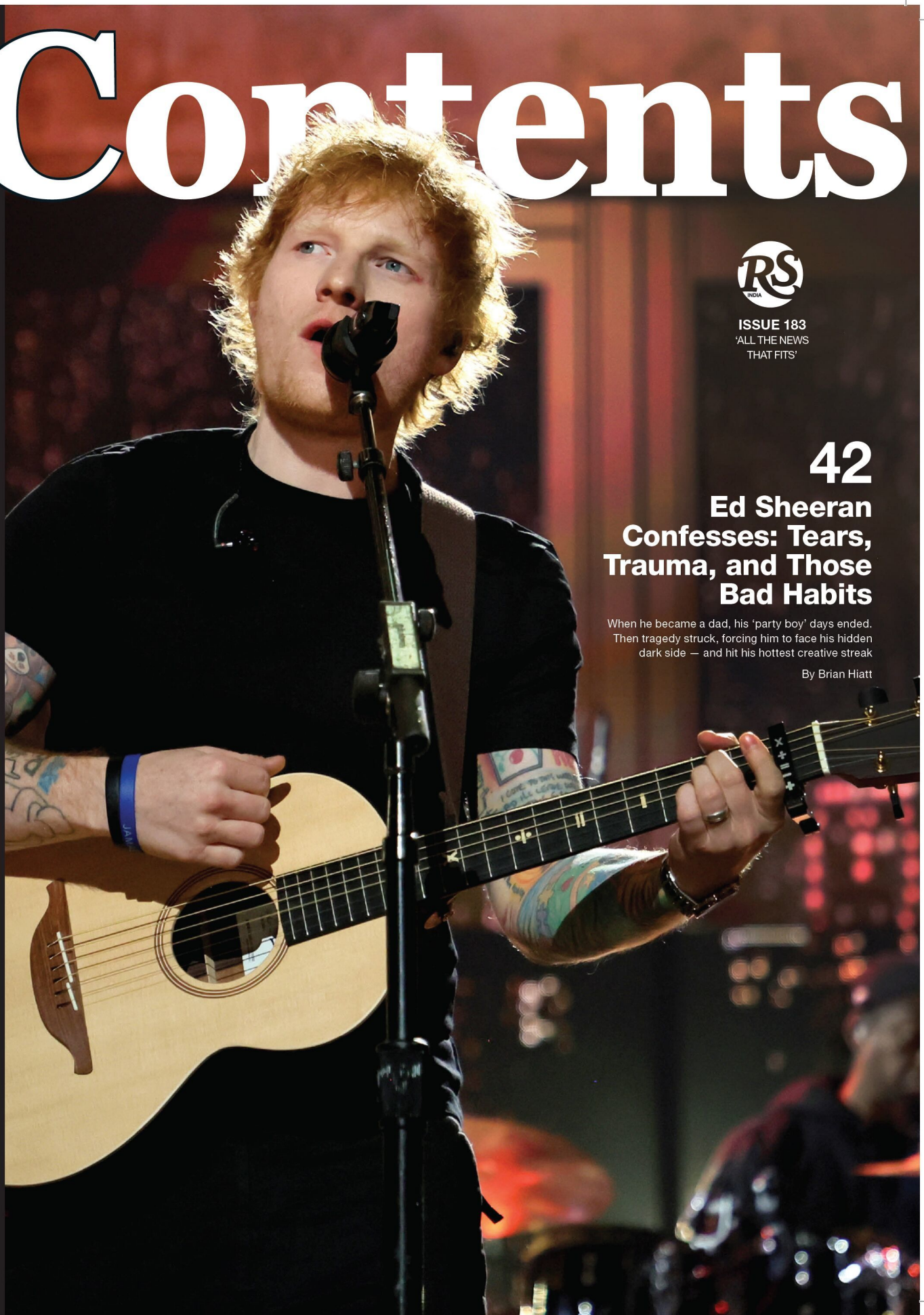
Inside Front Cover.indd 20 13/04/23 11:12 PM

Contents

ISSUE 183
'ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS'



42
Ed Sheeran Confesses: Tears, Trauma, and Those Bad Habits

When he became a dad, his 'party boy' days ended. Then tragedy struck, forcing him to face his hidden dark side — and hit his hottest creative streak

By Brian Hiatt

THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES

Content March 23_P.indd 2 14/04/23 6:54 PM

Contents

The Mix

13 **Prabh Deep Delivers Deluxe Version of 'Bhram'**
The 13-track record includes a host of collaborations

16 **Indian-Origin U.K. Artist Shivali Bhammer on the Far-Reaching Effects of Her Contemporary Bhajans**
The vocalist, along with composer-producer Arjun Coomaraswamy add R&B, EDM and pop versions of "Mahamrityunjaya Mantra" and devotional songs like "Om Jai Jagdish Hare" for their latest album, 'The Bhajan Project 2'

20 **How Tragedy Stirred Mumbai Hip-Hop Artist Shia to Turn to Music**
The singer-rapper recently released her latest single entitled 'Shia Bia' which has been produced by Zero Chill

23 **Different Strokes: Tennis Ace Somdev Devvarman Turns Singer-Songwriter with Debut Album 'One Three Two'**
The Chennai-based former tennis player, who now trains players and is a broadcast host, released the 13-track album on his birthday in February

ON THE COVER

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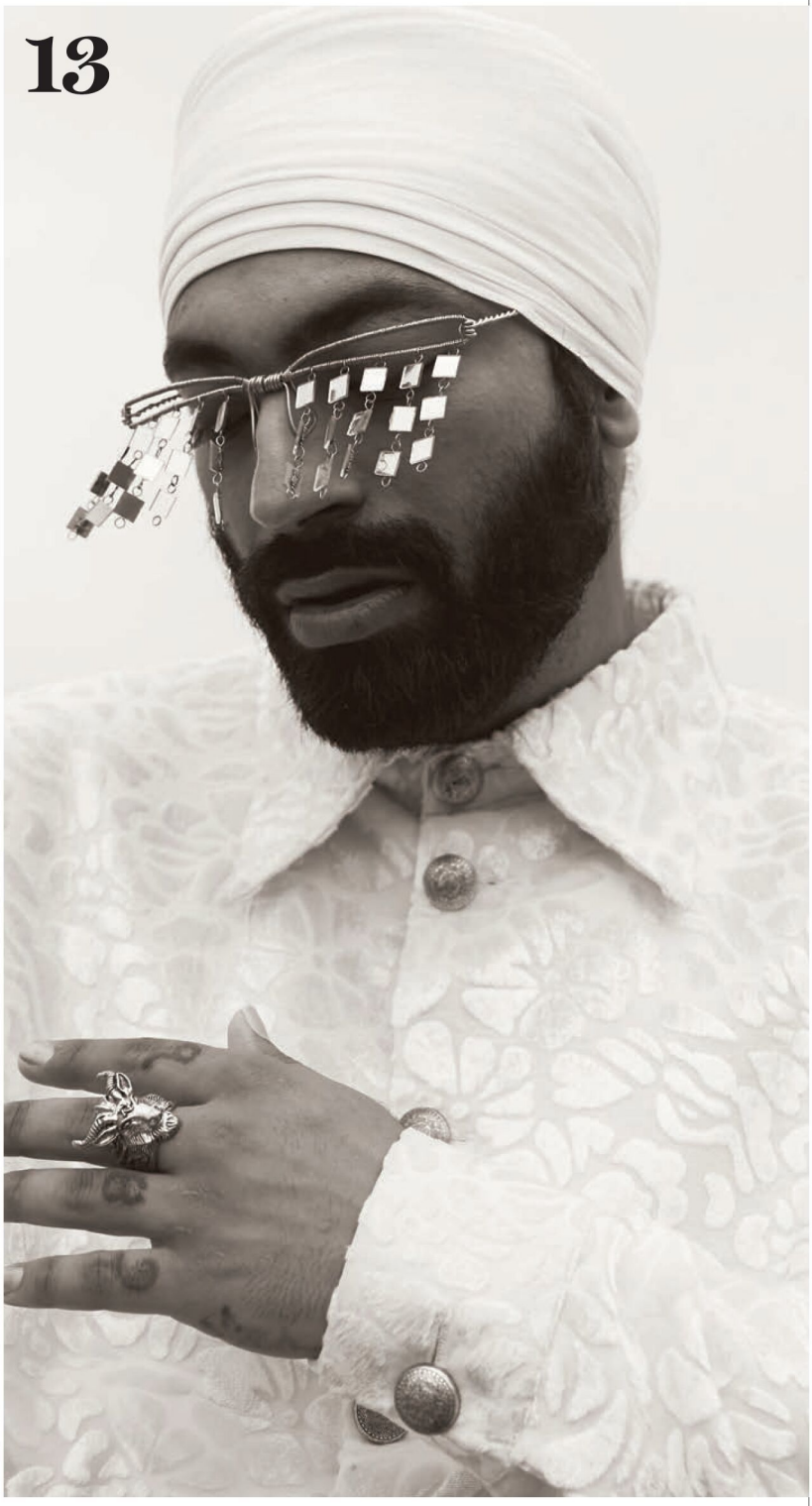

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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Correspondence

+ LOVE LETTERS & ADVICE

"With A.R. Rahman at the helm, the artists involved are sure to learn a lot."

— Raghav Rao

The Future Is in Good Hands

It was fantastic to know that NEXA Music is continuing in their endeavor to promote English music in India. With A.R. Rahman at the helm, the artists involved are sure to learn a lot and become even more skilled in their craft.

SPOTLIGHT

Buddy Guy's Last Run

It is bittersweet that blues legend Buddy Guy is hanging up his guitar after his ongoing Farewell Tour. Of course, he turns 87 this year and he is definitely due a break. I wish him all the very best in his retirement, thank you for the music, Buddy Guy.

Jazz Land

Learning about how musicians Anurag Naidu, Alba Santos, Aniel Someillan and Isais Alves met up in Sri Lanka to create a wonderful eight-track jazz album called 'Odyssey' was quite interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed the record and hope they connect again to write a follow-up.

AMYKITA's Heartbreak

After reading about indie pop/folk artist AMYKITA's song "Golden Days," I immediately went over to watch the music video and I must say that it was exquisite. The eye-catching visuals are stunning, and I urge everyone to see it.

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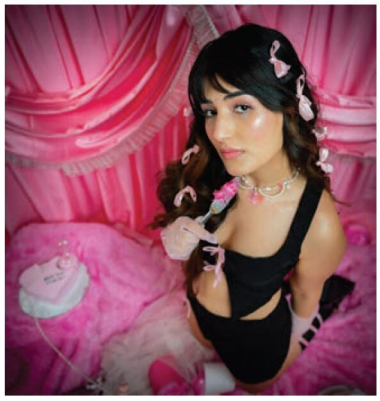
Shai on Receiving Feedback from Sir Paul McCartney, Releasing New Single 'Tum Na Mere Ho'

The Mumbai-based artist's fresh Hinglish track features a U.K. garage sound

WHILE GROWING UP, MUMBAI-BASED singer-songwriter Shayaan Oshidar aka Shai was brought up in a household that encouraged the arts and music. Shai's mother holds a degree in Indian classical music and her father would play world music tracks while at home. "There was always a lot of rhythm, a lot of music in the house, and everyone's creative in my family," says Shai. The singer's taste in music also developed when she began listening to rock outfit Mayday Parade, pop-rock band One Republic, pop singer Britney Spears as well as old Hindi music.

In 2014, Shai moved to the U.K. to study at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA), where she pursued songwriting and performing. While on Merseyside, the artist was one of seven students to be given the opportunity to work with the Beatles' Sir Paul McCartney. Shai recalls that moment and says, "I was pretty nervous, but it was a very intense experience. It was 20 minutes, and it was just one on one with my writing partner at the time. So, it's both of us because we had written a song together and basically, we had to show it to him [McCartney] and then he gave us his feedback and we worked on it together. So that was a pretty unreal experience." After finishing at LIPA, Shai stayed back in the U.K. where she contributed as a songwriter for other artists.



Upon returning to Mumbai in 2021, she began releasing her own material as she wanted to start telling her own story through her music, with singles such as "Read Your Mind," "Jaane Doon," "All Dressed Up" and "Hide Her from Me" already out, the artist's latest offering is the Hinglish U.K. garage-induced song "Tum Na Mere Ho."

Shai penned the new song only a few months ago, inspired by a previous relationship wherein she found out that her former partner was unfaithful to her. "'Tum Na Mere Ho' is basically almost about picturing it, and when you picture something like that, it really breaks you inside," she says. Sonically, the artist delivers a heartfelt vocal performance over polished production by A.$.A.D.

"The next step after releasing a few more singles and creating a little hype is definitely to perform live."

The singer is also keen on growing this sonic space that she's creating in India, tying in her Indian culture with her U.K. inspiration. "That mix is very unique," she says.

With a music video for "Tum Na Mere Ho" to follow, Shai also plans to consistently release music this year with more singles soon. There are even a few collaborations on the cards too. While music is a constant for her, Shai is also delving into the acting space with work on OTT platforms. "I've been working on my dancing and acting skills; you keep learning," Shai says, adding, "The next step after releasing a few more singles and creating a little hype is definitely to perform live." DAVID BRITTO

Mix - Shai Osh.indd 20 14/04/23 3:34 PM

Opening Act

Tove Lo Gets Her Game Face On

THE START of Tove Lo's North American *Dirt Femme* tour was "very much an emotional roller coaster," the Swedish pop star admits. With stress at "an all-time high" and a flu that "kicked my ass," she had to cancel three consecutive shows. But she's back now — and she's committed to bringing "150 percent of everything I have," with costumes that help her embody "a heroine from the retro-future with a lot of sexual expression." "The show is emotional, it's sexy, it's fun, it's vulnerable," says the singer, who will head to Europe this summer. "It's all wrapped up in a beautiful dance party." TOMÁS MIER

Tove Lo backstage in New York City in February

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The Mix

WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT, WHAT'S NUTS

Fousheé Is Going for Timeless

The co-writer of Steve Lacy's smash 'Bad Habit' has a distinctive vision and a voice that's all her own

PHOTOGRAPH BY Maggie Shannon

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The Power of iLe and Ivy Queen

ILEANA CABRA, known as iLe, was at home in Puerto Rico back in 2020, working on a song teeming with rage. "It was coming from a place of frustration, when frustration and anger mix," she says. "When we as women fight and work as collectives to destroy the patriarchy, to end femicides, to stop violence against women, there's always something that tries to minimize or devalue our struggle."

The track became "Algo Bonito," a defiant anthem that features reggaeton icon Ivy Queen, who brings strength and tenacity to her formidable verses. "She has this furious, feminist energy," iLe says. They finally met while making the video for the song, and ROLLING STONE was on set to see the two Puerto Rican powerhouses unite. "It was an amazing moment," iLe says. "We're on our way to dismantle the patriarchy." JULYSSA LOPEZ

▲ SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL
"Algo Bonito" is a standout on iLe's 2022 album, *Nacarile*, which tackles subjects that include current politics in Puerto Rico and gender dynamics.

▲ STANDING TOGETHER
It was iLe's brother Gabriel who originally suggested she collaborate with Ivy Queen (right). iLe reached out to the reggaeton icon with an idea she was working on, and the track came together from there.

FOUSHEÉ

Whether you're a New York native, a transplant, or just a visitor, you've probably seen a struggling artist performing on the subway. "Showtime, showtime, showtime!" street dancers often shout before flipping off the ceilings of the MTA cars and maneuvering around their poles. Going from "Showtime!" to stardom is rare, but Britanny Fousheé did give busking a shot, well before her 2022 breakout as the co-writer on one of the world's biggest pop songs — Steve Lacy's "Bad Habit."

"One time I tried to sing on the train," she says over Zoom. "And it just did not work out for me." Her tone is sharp and yet blasé, making it hard to imagine her clamoring for attention in a crowd of commuters. "You see how low I speak," she continues, her voice indeed hushed. Her singing voice is even more distinct, as showcased on "Sunshine," a standout on Lacy's *Gemini Rights*. It's beautifully faint and a little creaky, like Billie Eilish on "bad guy" meets Norah Jones on "Don't Know Why." "They were like, 'What?'" she recalls of the passengers she subjected to her show.

When we talked, Fousheé — whose surname is also her stage name — was gearing up for her first Grammy Awards, where *Gemini Rights* went on to win Best Progressive R&B Album. ("Bad Habit" earned even bigger nods, for Song of the Year, Record of the Year, and Best Pop Solo Performance, but lost all three.)

While the wide range of star musicians she's collaborated with includes Lil Wayne, Lil Yachty, and Lil Uzi Vert, Fousheé is a force on her own. Last November, she dropped a solo EP, *softCORE*, a witty and elegant 27-minute mashup of folk, punk, metal, and electronica — sometimes in a single song.

The breadth of Fousheé's sounds is united under her hip-hop sensibilities, her melodic capacity, her technicality as a producer and instrumentalist, and her sharp executive vision.

FAST FACTS

CLASSICS
Bob Marley, Carole King, and Lauryn Hill are some of Fousheé's heroes.

STORYTELLER
She says Lacy's "Bad Habit" "started with an observation about himself, and [we] just made it a story."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Rose Marie Cromwell

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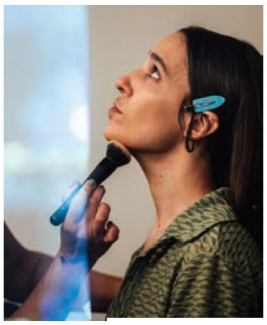
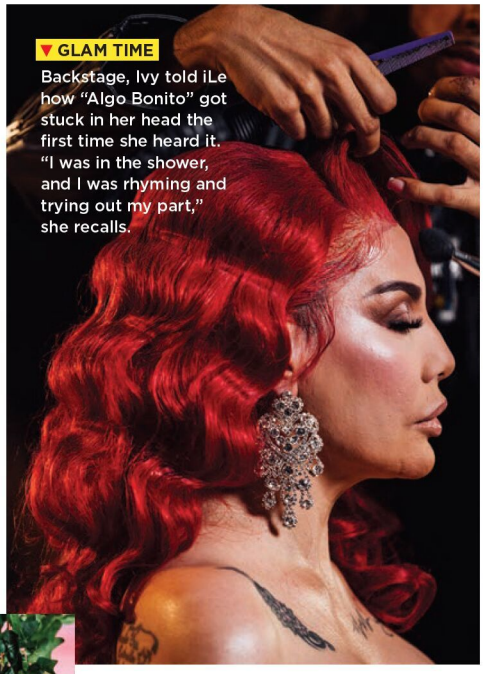


◀ JOINING VOICES

"Talking about feminism is complicated," says iLe, who has been vocal about violence against women and gender inequality. "It's amazing when you feel like someone understands you and you can express those feelings."



▼ GLAM TIME

Backstage, Ivy told iLe how "Algo Bonito" got stuck in her head the first time she heard it. "I was in the shower, and I was rhyming and trying out my part," she recalls.

▲ RING OF FIRE

Given the song's forceful message, iLe wanted the video to communicate power in a more subtle way. Some scenes dip into surreal imagery, borrowing from old Westerns and samurai films. Toward the end, Ivy and iLe unite over a circle of flames. "That fire represents the collective union, the defiance, the rage we feel inside," iLe says.

iLe, who used to perform with her brothers as part of the acclaimed 2000s reggaeton group Calle 13, cites Ivy Queen as a major influence. She remembers hearing "Yo Quiero Bailar," Ivy's signature empowerment hit, as a teenager: "For Ivy to speak from a feminist place, with so much power, and to be so direct — well, it's why she's the queen."

▲ LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

The video was directed by Puerto Rican filmmaker Claudia Calderón, and the set was led by women. "You just feel more comfortable knowing you get each other," iLe says. "Ivy was like, 'Ay, this is so great.'"

Bringing it all together is her writing: earnest, sarcastic, startling — even at its most gentle. On "Sunshine," she gracefully diminishes a difficult lover: "I took the high road/You ran through everyone/Is it still that special if the whole world had some?" On the harsher *softCORE* highlight "die," all distortion and drums, she screeches, "He said I'm too mean/Like I give a fuck/You better tighten up/Stop crying and light the blunt."

Before all of this, she might have been best known for an originally uncredited vocal sample of hers on Brooklyn drill rapper Sleepy Hallow's hit "Deep End Freestyle." As "Deep End Freestyle" took off on TikTok, Fousheé pushed for public and professional recognition for her work, eventually releasing a new song written around her refrain "I don't think you want to go off the deep end/I don't think you want to give me a reason." Fousheé's own "Deep End" now has over 250 million plays.

"When you read a book, those characters live forever. I would like my art to live the same way — just stories and experiences."

Next, Fousheé is going for timeless. It's the principle guiding her as she's begun to record her debut album. Timelessness was the goal of her Grammy look, a sheer, slim, off-shoulder Givenchy gown in black that swept the thick, triangular closed toe of her silvery, ankle-strapped heels. And when I casually ask Fousheé how old she is — I'm 29, and she looks my age or younger — she coolly responds, "I don't have an age."

She thinks about it like this: "When you read a book, those characters just kind of live forever. I would like my art to live the same way — not be standing around age or personal things, just the stories and experiences."

Fair enough. With her bold takes on rock, rap, and R&B, her bleach-blond hair, enviable style, and measured attitude, Fousheé offers a new archetype of a woman — a Black woman — being whoever the hell she wants in a world that so often stifles those desires and the pursuit of them. And really, what's more timeless than that? MANKAPRR CONTEH

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Prabh Deep Delivers Deluxe Version of 'Bhram'

The 13-track record includes a host of collaborations

After releasing his thrilling eight-track album *Bhram* last year, New Delhi rapper Prabh Deep kicked off 2023 with a four-track EP entitled *PRAA*. Without wasting much time, the artist has now released a deluxe version of *Bhram* that consists of 13 songs.

According to a press note, "*Bhram Deluxe* takes a profound look at the man-made illusions that have become intrinsic to human civilization. This album explores the illusions that communities attach themselves to and addresses the structure behind them to reveal the driving motive behind it all; power."

Bhram Deluxe is also brimming with collaborations and includes features from fellow artists including GD47 and Encore ABJ on the dreamy "Sukoon," SYPS on the industrial sounding "Nafrat," Ikka for the intrinsic "Samaaj" and Calm on the shapeshifting "Shaitaan."

Other collaborations include the hard-hitting Ahmer feature on "Inayat," the slick Scuti track "Sagar" and the Raftaar-induced song "Tajurba."

The statement added, "The collaborations on *Bhram Deluxe* are a reflection and expansion of Prabh's interwoven community which brings in more layered perspectives to expand Prabh's universe. The illusion of power eclipses our lives, and every track on *Bhram Deluxe* dismantles it."

Prabh Deep is also heard making peace with his past on the wistful "Paisa," addressing the negative side of fame on the smooth "Shaurat" and praising the power of community on the scorching "Rishte."

The rapper has also released visuals to go with the songs. "Creating a visual cosmos with *Bhram Deluxe*, the imagery is carefully curated with intricate detail – from the costumes adorned by Prabh to the forgotten histories of the landscapes depicted through seamless movement, the project sees him add another facet to his unique style of multidimensional storytelling," the statement said.

With *Bhram Deluxe*, there's quite a lot to pick from for fans of Prabh Deep. The rapper's unique sonic embellishments coupled with his one-of-a-kind delivery make it quite a listen and one that is sure to garner plenty of plays. With so much fresh music from Prabh Deep out already this year, one can only imagine what he's got in store for the rest of 2023.

DAVID BRITTO

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Mix - Prabh Deep.indd 13 13/04/23 9:56 PM

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Pakistani Actor Adnan Siddiqui on Taking Creative Control: 'Give Me Something Good Or Listen To My Offer'

Known for his work in T.V. shows, roles in Bollywood film 'Mom' alongside Sridevi and 2007 Hollywood film 'A Mighty Heart,' the Lahore-raised actor is also a series and film producer

Adnan Siddiqui believes an actor has no boundaries, certainly not politically drawn ones that define geography on a cultural and sociological level. Toward the end of our conversation, the Lahore-raised actor and producer reminds us how – once upon a time – India and Pakistan were one country.

He does this in the context of the hate comments he received via social media for mourning the passing of former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf in February. "The kind of hatred in those comments [online] that was really sad to see. Just because our two countries are not in a good situation, it doesn't mean you should say, '*Accha hua chala gaya*' [good that he died]. My heart bleeds to see such comments."

Siddiqui can speak about these topics only because he's an actor who has built stature and experience over the last 31 years, a contemporary to the likes of Humayun Saeed (who are also close friends) and also crossed over into Bollywood with 2017 film Mom, alongside the late actor Sridevi. In 2007, Siddiqui also shared cast credits with the likes of Angelina Jolie and Irrfan Khan in the Hollywood production *A Mighty Heart*, which detailed the kidnapping of American journalist Daniel Pearl.

Television dramas remain Siddiqui's forte right from the Nineties and he recently added reality shows such as Tamasha (similar to U.K. series *Big Brother*) to his list. With the latter, he was accused of copying the Indian counterpart *Bigg Boss*

Adnan Siddiqui.indd 14 13/04/23 3:24 PM

and its host Salman Khan. "I got bashed like anything," Siddiqui says with a laugh. He had to clarify that he wasn't copying anyone. So influential was his role as a host who enters the house and mingles with the contestants — an original idea introduced in this format — that the Indian counterpart *Bigg Boss* host and superstar Salman Khan too began entering the house to participate in activities as part of the recent season 14. "I wrote a post then to say, 'I rest my case.' I was getting a lot of appreciation from India as well," Siddiqui adds.

At this point in his career, choosing (and creating) roles is an important journey to navigate to Siddiqui. That's also where his role as a producer – the founder of production company Cereal Entertainment – comes in. He describes his process of sitting down with writers and network teams to share ideas and "one-liners" and how it evolves into show or film productions.

That kind of creative control is important for Siddiqui, because the entertainment industry in the subcontinent has often been driven by select producers or channel owners, according to the actor. "That's the reason you have to raise your voice and make yourself available. It's teamwork at the end of the day, because an actor is made by a team and you're supposed to support them, not just go and do your lines like a puppet," he says.

As producer of his company's first feature film *Dum Mastam* in 2022, Siddiqui recalls how he was grilled by critics about why he didn't take on the lead role in his own production. "It wasn't for a person of my age, so I didn't do it. I had to be loyal to my work and it's not like I was doing this just for me," he says.

"I worked with telcos, I worked with multi-national companies. So I know how to treat myself as a brand."

The actor and producer's thought processes and personal philosophies are often backed by his experience in a wholly different field – marketing. "I worked with telcos, I worked with multi-national companies. So I know how to treat myself as a brand," Siddiqui says. Doing his own SWOT analysis, the actor knew he had to grow by working on more international projects. "I strongly believe that actors have no boundaries. It's all about spreading your art and sharing and learning from other countries as well," he adds.

Even as Siddiqui is seen as captain of the team Lahore Falcons in T.V. game show *Jeeto Pakistan League* – "It is something of a battle, but in a very sweet way," is how he describes the happenings – and *Tamasha*, there's an upcoming movie from Cereal Entertainment in which he's also acting. The actor adds, "I'm selecting some scripts for my next movie. Then I'm writing a serial with a team, for myself." ANURAG TAGAT

Adnan Siddiqui.indd 15 13/04/23 3:24 PM

COURTESY OF SONY MUSIC INDIA

Indian-Origin U.K. Artist Shivali Bhammer's Contemporary Bhajans Have Far-Reaching Effects

The vocalist, along with composer-producer Arjun Coomaraswamy add R&B, EDM and pop versions of devotional songs like "Om Jai Jagdish Hare" for her latest album, The Bhajan Project 2

BHAJANS AND DEVOTIONAL MUSIC ARE an inseparable part of growing up in an Indian household, but there's undoubtedly been a need to keep updating them for different audiences, across age and even geographical boundaries. U.K. artist Shivali Bhammer and her co-producer (and childhood friend) Arjun Coomaraswamy know this all too well. When they worked on *The Bhajan Project* and released it in 2010, it marked a new production and composition interpretation of everything from the Gayatri Mantra and Hanuman Chalisa to "Achutum Kesevam."

While the Indian market is rife with devotional song renditions by the thousands, Shivali (who goes by her first name as an artist) made a clutter-breaking record in 2010 and followed it up with *Urban Temple* in 2012. Performing and shooting music videos on the back of these records, the singer finally put out *The Bhajan Project 2* last month, teaming up with singer-songwriter Coomaraswamy once again for eight tracks and half an hour of what is called "contemporary bhajans." Everything from scintillating electronic to R&B, pop and lo-fi treatments are given to devotional songs and believe it or not, they certainly work and have gone a long way in building Shivali's dedicated fanbase.

In an interview with *Rolling Stone India*, Shivali talks about the differences between projects, working with Coomaraswamy and the memories that listeners have shared about her renditions. Excerpts:

It's been 13 years between the two Bhajan Project albums. How do you look back at the first album in the context of this new record?
Shivali: It's strange to say but I look back at the first album and feel incredibly proud of it, because it has really stood the test of time and sounds fresh and relevant even when you compare it to my second album, *Urban Temple* and then this third one, *The Bhajan Project 2*. As for enormous success – I think that is hard in bhajans, however, I had someone tell me recently that my music was their entire childhood, so I consider that a win!

You've also worked with Arjun once again for this album. What are your inputs usually like for the sonic treatment of these bhajans, considering they cover a few different genres?
Arjun is deeply creative when it comes to production and I tend to have a direction or vibe that I want the bhajan to evoke. So we start

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"It's important to me to really understand the meaning of the songs and also represent them authentically."

by listening to traditional versions and then I'll usually have a genre in mind, like R&B, or EDM or pop, and Arjun can quickly start to shape out the sounds. We play around with the melody quite a bit, for example in *The Bhajan Project 2*, we have created 'space' or 'gaps' where traditionally there weren't any, and that has added a different kind of texture and depth to the song, for example in "Raghupati Raghava" and "Om Jai Jagdish Hare."

As a part of the Indian diaspora, how important is it to interpret these songs in your own way and perhaps give something that both Indians in India and people all over the world enjoy? Have you heard some stories from listeners about their memories attached to your music?

It's important to me to really understand the meaning of the songs and also represent them authentically. Every bhajan is chosen for a specific purpose, it is never random!

I have heard some wonderful stories that are charming and amusing. A mother once told me her baby would only allow her to breast-feed if "Bolo Ram" from The *Bhajan Project* was playing. I thought that was quite funny! I received a letter from a woman who had broken her leg and insisted that our version of the Hanuman Chalisa be played during the surgery and then the full album was looped in her hospital room upon recovery. Recently I spoke at a school in London and met a number of fans there and I think what touched me the most is that my bhajans had somehow sparked their love of our culture, philosophy and had helped shape their identity growing up.

Which songs were among the first to have started *The Bhajan Project 2*?

Good question, I am trying to remember! "Om Jai Jagdish Hare," I think that was the first one we did and without a doubt, it is one of my favorites on the album, that and "Paayoji Maine" which is really different. I don't think I have ever heard a version of "Paayoji Maine" like ours, it is very western in production but so soothing and sweet.

As someone who's introduced a new interpretation to bhajans, what is it like consistently keeping at it and trying to create something refreshing compared to what's already out there?

I think because we were the pioneers, we have always been a step ahead in terms of sound. Also, I think what really works for us is that there is a deep friendship beneath the music between Arjun and I. He is my *rakhi* brother and we started this musical journey as kids, I think that kind of history works in our favor because we are so familiar with one another and with our strengths and weaknesses when it comes to musicality. Plus, anything made with love somehow sounds fresh, it is when you start doing something simply for the sake of it, that it can sound tired.

What else is coming up in 2023? Do you have any music videos for these songs or shows coming up?

We do! We have the "Om Jai Jagdish Hare" music video, which will be released on *Ram Navami*. It's a simple video that was shot at the Hare Krishna Mandir in Watford, London, which I have been visiting since childhood. It felt very special to shoot there and kind of like a 'coming home' 'full circle' feeling especially as my first ever music video, "Bolo Ram," was shot at the Hare Krishna Mandir in Chowpatty, Mumbai. ANURAG TAGAT

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Actor You Need to Know: Chae Soo-bin

Be it romantic roles, dramas or cameos, Chae has this innate knack for delivering different roles with aplomb

CHAE SOO-BIN'S IS A STORY OF SERENDIPITY. Her career in acting began with the 2014 film *My Dictator* after a casting director discovered her on the streets. She was still a teenager at the time. Now 28 years old, Chae has conclusively demonstrated her knack for delivering vivacious performances, exuding a natural sweetness that complements her personality and aesthetic impact. It's something I noticed while watching her in the classic sci-fi romance K-drama *I'm Not a Robot* (December 2017–January 2018). She played Jo Ji-ah, a brilliant businesswoman and scientist, as well as Aji 3, the most advanced humanoid robot ever made. By seamlessly reflecting both individuals' emotions, she beautifully alienated the subtleties of their characteristics.

Chae is a tour de force who has built her name over the course of her eight-year career. Following an appearance in the 2015 drama *House of Bluebird*, she was cast in the teen love story drama *Cheer Up!* Set at an elite school in Seoul, it chronicles the lives of five kids battling its harsh environment where academic snobbery reigns supreme. Chae portrayed Kwon Soo-ah in the youth series, a depressed student who turns to exploiting others to live up to her mother's lofty aspirations. For her part, she took home the Best New Actress awards at both the 4th APAN Star Awards and the 29th KBS Drama Awards.

Chae is a fantastic character actor who is also noteworthy in cameo roles, imprinting each production with her unique style. She rose to fame, for instance, thanks to her role in the well-liked historical rom-com *Love in the Moonlight* (2016). She was recognized as Jo Ha-yeon, a woman ahead of her time. I liked the character's conceit, her perceptiveness, and her candor. Chae surpassed the requirements of the role by showcasing her talent in the stint and was nominated for an Excellence Award at the 30th KBS Drama Awards. That same year, she appeared in both the play *Blackbird* and the Chinese-South Korean web drama *My Catman*.

In the period television series, *The Rebel* (2017), which follows Hong Gil-dong (Yoon Kyun-sang), Joseon's first revolutionary activist, she took on her maiden leading role. Chae played Song Ga-ryung, Gil-dong's love interest and eventual wife. Her fame increased as a result of *The Rebel*, despite its limited success. Chae's successive dramas, *I'm Not a Robot* and *Strongest Deliveryman* (2017), led to her mass popularity, as did *Where Stars Land* (2018). She co-starred in the airport-themed drama with Lee Je-hoon and went on to win the Excellence Award at the SBS Drama Awards, offering her a better shot at stardom.

The actress's cogent expressive power also makes her a superb romantic lead, as seen in her portrayals alongside Jung Hae-in in *A Piece of Your Mind* (2020), Jang Ki-yong in *Sweet & Sour* (2020), Kang Daniel in *Rookie Cops* (2022), and Choi Min-ho (SHINee) in the most recent *The Fabulous* (2022). In each of these works, the actress encapsulated a vivid sensitivity that emphasized the essence of the romantic scenes with her co-stars. Perhaps Chae Soo-bin successfully captures the traits of a young, alluring woman who can captivate a man by merely looking into his eyes – or just by passing a smile. DEBASHREE DUTTA

PHOTO COURTESY OF NETFLIX

Chae Soo-bin.indd 20 13/04/23 3:20 PM

Demystifying the Haenyeo Women of Jeju Island

Several of these women, who are already in their eighties, dive for shellfish like abalone and sea urchins for food and family

A BRILLIANT PIECE ON THE HAENYEO WOMEN of Jeju Island by UNESCO & HERITAGE left me lost for words the other day. As I read the article, it occurred to me that these women are exceptionally alluring in their ability to wield authority in a patriarchal setting by virtue of what they do. And in doing so, they affirm women's equality, preserve Jeju Island's uniqueness, and promote long-term prosperity.

South of the Korean peninsula sits the island of Jeju, one of the most beautiful holiday destinations in the country. It's dubbed 'Korea's Hawaii,' which is where you'll find the amazing haenyeo women in addition to towering mountains and roaring winds. Who are these women, though? They are the ones who sustain their families, plunging into the sea without any equipment that helps them breathe. Several of these women, some of whom are already in their eighties, dive for shellfish like abalone and sea urchins for food. According to UNESCO & HERITAGE, Jejuhaenyeo, who are experts in the sea, hold their breath for one minute each time they dive, which amounts to almost seven hours per day and 90 days a year.

The haenyeo women initially appeared in historical records in the 17th century. It is reported by *Business Korea* that, possibly, men frequently got lost in the sea while out fishing or working on battleships, leaving their wives behind. Hence, diving became a responsibility for women to make a living. At the same time, they started engaging in agricultural production by reaping the land. The haenyeo women are revered in Jeju society because of this ritual, which has persisted for more than a thousand years.

The Jejuhaenyeo community is split into three classes based on their material abilities: upper, middle and lower, or Ha-gun, Jung-gun and Sang-gun. Since Sang-gun haenyeo have spent a lot of time around water and are experts on the reefs and seafood, they frequently mentor other haenyeo women in acquiring practical skills in addition to an understanding of haenyeo culture and civic responsibilities.

Before diving, these women call upon a shaman to offer a prayer to the sea goddess for a successful catch and safety. It's interesting to note that the ama women are the Japanese equivalent of the haenyeo women, based on a report in *Culture Trip*. The amas gather abalone, seaweed, and other shellfish, identical to what haenyeo women do. Nonetheless, diving for pearls is their most lucrative activity. The women surface after holding their breath for two minutes at a time and make the same 'Sumbi-sori' whistling sound as the haenyo women by gently exhaling.

The haenyeo culture of Jeju is vitally pertinent to the identity of the people of Jeju because it is believed that almost every inhabitant has a haenyeo in their family. People, organizations, haenyeo associations, schools, and museums all play a part in passing on important knowledge to the next generation in order to preserve the heritage. The image of a haenyeo diving headfirst into a turbulent sea without any respiratory support is a striking representation of the spirit of the Jeju people. As a result, haenyeo has become synonymous with Jeju Island and has helped raise the prestige of women there as well as promote environmental sustainability through safe fishing practices and local fisheries management. DEBASHREE DUTTA

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How Tragedy Stirred Mumbai Hip-Hop Artist Shia to Turn to Music

The singer-rapper recently released her latest single entitled 'Shia Bia' which has been produced by Zero Chill

Although Mumbai hip-hop artist Shia has always been inclined towards music since she was in school, the rapper never took it seriously. However, at 18, Shia was hit with tragedy when her father and grandfather – who ran their family business – both passed away in the span of a year. Shia says, "Our company went bankrupt, and I had to drop out of college because of this financial duress that came upon us."

It was during this time that Shia began gigging, going for open mics and interacting with like-minded artists. "I actually started considering myself as someone who might have potential in it [music]," she says. Since then, Shia has gone on to release a few singles and even perform at large events and festivals. "This is where I am today. Every day I have to sit with my beats, and I have to sit and write."

Shia admits that she wasn't always into hip-hop music and was actually quite a fan of heavy music. Growing up, she would listen to music by Welsh metal outfit Bullet for My Valentine and U.S. thrash metallers Metallica. "I was in love with Kirk Hammet [Metallica's guitarist]," she says. However, it was the influence that American rapper Eminem had on her that tugged Shia towards hip-hop. "I think it's safe to say a lot of people were influenced by his music. I grew a little bit out of rock music and I got more into hip-hop," says Shia.

The rapper's latest single is the bass-heavy and gritty "Shia Bia" (out via Found Out Records) and is produced by her go-to collaborator Zero Chill. The new song follows last year's release, the fierce "Boon," and touches upon modern-day sexiness.

On "Shia Bia," the Mumbai artist deliberately adopts the style of American rapper Bia. Shia says, "This was actually kind of my way of reaching out to her [Bia]. I wouldn't say 'Shia Bia' is a representation of who I am, but it is a song based on what people have told me [how to sound]." Shia was able to attain Bia's attention on social media when the U.S. artist commented on one of her posts. "I think that was the intention that I had set out with," says Shia. There's also a slick music video released to accompany the track, in which Shia is seen performing the song outdoors near a beach and in a hotel room.

Currently, Shia is keen on releasing more singles to keep the momentum going and she's also planning on working on collaborations too. She says, "I'll drop an album when I get a good response and when I feel like the sound is there." The artist adds, "Hip-hop is more than just music. It's actually [about] changing the way people see the world. I want hip-hop to bring a shift in the way the economy runs in India, and I see that the music industry is going to blow up someday and really help our country be better and more aware." DAVID BRITTO

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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Blues Artist Christone "Kingfish" Ingram on How He Got His Nickname, India Debut and More

The American artist performed at the Mahindra Blues Festival last month in Mumbai

Twenty-four-year-old American blues musician Christone "Kingfish" Ingram is all set to make his India debut this weekend at the Mahindra Blues Festival at Mumbai's Mehboob Studios. Before his performance at the event, we spoke to Ingram about his music, how he received the name "Kingfish," and more. Read below.

I wanted to understand what it was like for you growing up in Clarksdale, Mississippi.

When I was growing up, music was pretty much all around, especially the blues. More of the older guys were alive at the time and I lived right next to a blues band. So, blues was just prevalent at the time. Gospel as well, church [music], all that.

When I interviewed Buddy Guy in 2020, I asked him who the new young blues musicians people should keep an eye out for are and he recommend you. How does it feel to be validated by a legend like him?

Wow, I appreciate that. It's a really beautiful and amazing feeling. Mr. Guy was one of the first bluesmen that I felt I connected with and was very influenced by everything that he did, from how he pushed the blues boundaries to how he does a whole show. So, most definitely it felt like a sigh of relief when he liked what I did.

Your interest in the blues came about through Muddy Waters. Can you tell me about that?

My dad showed me a *PBS* documentary on Muddy Waters and Muddy was the first person I saw when I didn't know how to play, and Buddy was the first person I saw once I knew how to play that style. My favorite Muddy Waters song I would say is 'Long Distance Call.' I love how the slide pierces on this song.

How did you get the nickname 'Kingfish'?

Back home in America there's an old sitcom called *Amos 'n' Andy*, one of the first black sitcoms, and there was a character on there called Kingfish. Well, one of my teachers, who's also a bluesman back home, gave me that name because he said I reminded him of that character.

You've got two albums out, *Kingfish* and *662* – what can you tell me about those records and what they mean to you?

Well, the first record *Kingfish* was kind of like an introduction to myself, to my life, what was going on in my head. I feel like *662* was a deeper introduction. I got more in-depth about my life and what I've been going through at that time and whatnot.

How does it feel to be in India for the first time?

Man, no words can describe it honestly. I never thought I would get to India, especially this early in my career, so I'm just thankful that everybody thought that I was great enough to be here. It's really cool to give some blues to you guys, most definitely. We've mostly toured Europe and the U.K. Honestly, overseas everywhere the blues is more accepted in today's time rather than in the States. Everything's all mainstream music back home, but you guys really do have a love and you guys are very appreciative of it as well.

What can folks expect from your set?

They can expect some of everything. Some of the old blues and new blues. Just a really fiery show for sure.

What plans do you have for the rest of the year?

I just came from L.A. We've been doing different sessions, trying to do some new stuff for a new record. I should have something out at least later this year. DAVID BRITTO

"Muddy Waters was the first person I saw when I didn't know how to play, and Buddy Guy was the first person I saw once I knew how to play that style [blues]."

ERIKA GOLDRING/GETTY IMAGES

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How Content Creator Dev Raiyani is Focusing on Music In Earnest

The Mumbai-raised, Los Angeles-based artist recently released "butYOU" with producer Dropped Out and says he's making music in his dorm every day

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

DEV RAIYANI SETS THE RECORD straight soon enough in an email interview that music is not an added dimension to being a content creator. "Music is something I want to do over creating content," the 21-year-old artist says. That said, he's never going to leave one for the other, knowing he has a "passion for both."

Born and raised in Mumbai and currently studying undergrad in Los Angeles, Raiyani has – by his own admission on YouTube to his 125,000 subscribers – recorded a lot of his life on video. Vlogging his affable and sometimes meme-stuffed, peak Gen-Z life experiences, Raiyani also began releasing music around 2020 and those following him for his content naturally flowed to understand his hip-hop informed musical output, heard on songs like "Wait4me," "Thinking Back" and "Cool Boy."

The singer-producer has been steeped in music ever since. Raiyani says, "Over the past few years, I have learned new instruments and DAWs, collaborated with different artists, and experimented with the type of music I want to make. For example, I recently went to a tech-house party and became heavily inspired by it, so I started making music without lyrics, just beautiful synths and beats."

While it might be a while until you hear a more electronic producer-centric record from Raiyani, he plays to his strengths on his latest single "ButYOU," made in collaboration with Mumbai producer Dropped Out aka Rishi Thakker. Raiyani says he was originally working with his friend Liam McLaughlin on the song

"Over the past few years, I have learned new instruments and DAWs, collaborated with different artists, and experimented with the type of music I want to make."

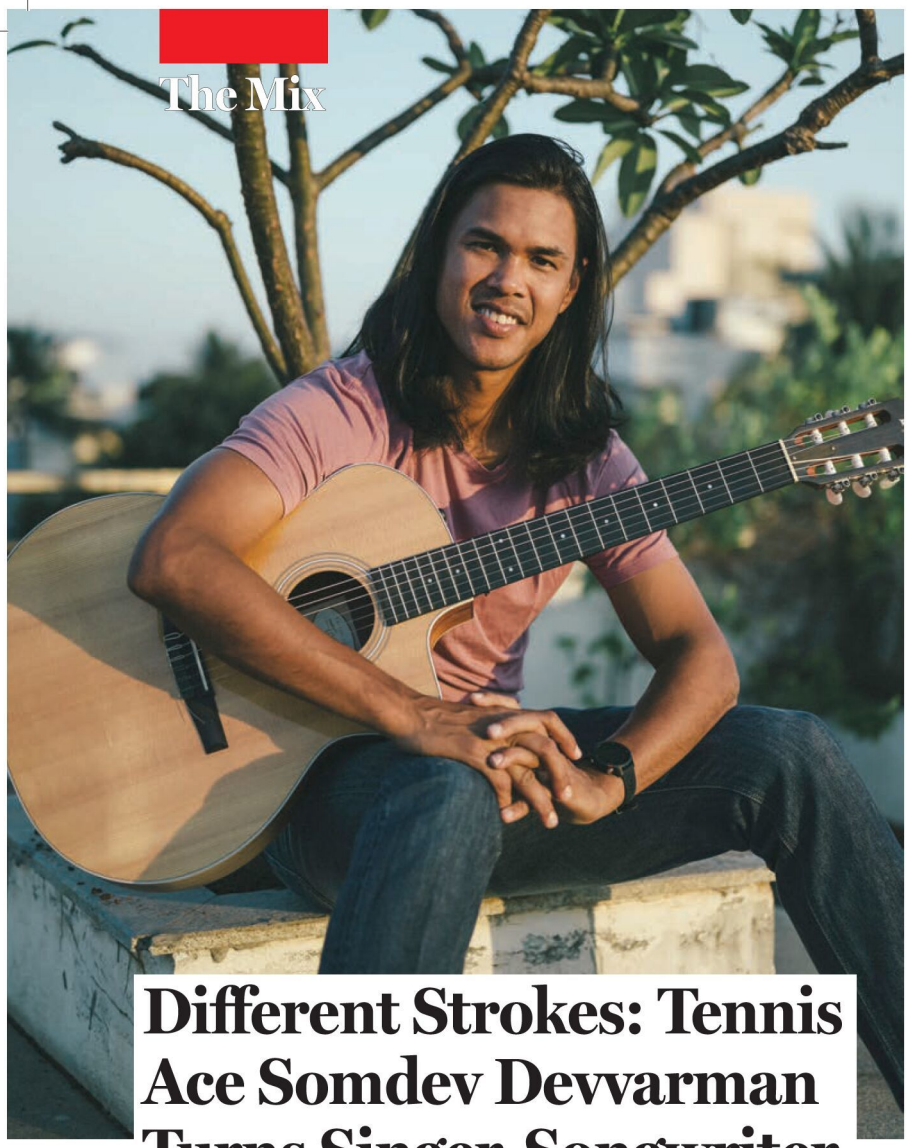
in his dorm about five months ago. The artist adds, "He then told me to actually try to use my voice, something I hadn't really explored before, and that turned into this beautiful R&B vibe that we loved."

Once he was back in Mumbai, Raiyani connected with Dropped Out and checked out the track. Dropped Out's production has led to "butYOU" taking emphasis away from beats for the most part and becoming a wavy, late-night jam for longing, rooted in Raiyani's chill-hop and pop influences. "The result was phenomenal," Raiyani adds about the song.

As a bedroom singer-producer, he's making music in his dorm every day. "Most of it, I scrap. I've just been experimenting with what I want to do," Raiyani says.

The artist thought up a music video for "butYOU" with a 20 team in tow, but realized he hadn't reached a stage where he could justify spending costs for it. "Instead I wanted to ask my listeners to film random aesthetic clips and send them to me, out of which I wanna make a video for it," he says. With a short four-city tour that took place in 2022 in India, Raiyani is looking to shake off the stereotypes that come from being a digital creator who's told to stick to making Reels instead of performing his songs live. This year is wholly about music and Raiyani says he can't "wait to see what happens next." ANURAG TAGAT

Dev Raiyani.indd 22 13/04/23 3:27 PM



NEERAJ DEV VARMA

Different Strokes: Tennis Ace Somdev Devvarman Turns Singer-Songwriter with Debut Album

The Chennai-based former tennis player, who now trains players and is a broadcast host, released the 13-track album 'One Three Two' on his birthday in February

WHILE TALKING ABOUT HIS bright and bluesy song "The Seeker," Somdev Devvarman picks up his guitar to recount the lyrics he's trying to explain. The erstwhile tennis pro – who released his debut album *One Three Two* as a singer-songwriter last month – begins strumming chords and humming another song, "Ode to Justice," during our phone call to refresh his memory about the meaning behind the works that now make him an indie artist.

A singer-songwriter who began learning guitar around the same time he started training on the tennis court as a nine-year-old, Devvarman's love for music is heard warmly throughout the 13-track album. There's a little bit of the Beatles, a lot of easy-listening artists like Jack Johnson and Dave Matthews and Devvarman even counts Scottish rock band Frightened Rabbit's late bandleader Scott Hutchison as a big influence. The artist who drove Devvarman into action in terms of writing music around 2017, however, was pop singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran. After attending a concert soon after retiring from professional tennis after decades in the sport, Devvarman was especially inspired to write his album's gentle opening song "New Man." It's now all out via Chennai platform OriginalDog.

For Devvarman, the journey to writing an album's worth of music (and plenty more in the songbook) came from listening first, then feeling brave enough to write and heading into the studio. "Step four, which I really need to get a grasp on, is just promoting it the right way. It's just baby steps," he says. Working with artists in Shillong such as Jeremy B Mawlong, guitarist Gregory Ford Nongrum and drummer Vincent Tariang, most of *One Three Two* has a simple yet effective kind of singer-songwriter approach, embellished with the occasional blues, rock and pop elements that keep the listener hooked beyond Devvarman's lyrical philosophizing.

While Devvarman has already performed with a band and a full set at Covelong Point Festival near Chennai, releasing an album was a different beast. "While I was writing it for myself, I kept playing it over to my wife or my family and people around me and getting their thoughts. That push and pull process was constant," he adds. In the process of working out in Shillong, he also gained some helpful advice. "My friends told me, 'Learn, but don't change the way you write, because it's different than the way a lot of musicians would write,'" the artist says.

At the core of Devvarman's songwriting, one could say, are a lot of philosophical thoughts. He says with a laugh that he's "reasonably philosophical" but backs that up with how his coaches, family, friends and books informed his thoughts. Beyond that, songs like "Ode to Justice" have portions inspired by the 2003 crime/thriller film *The Life of David Gale*. "Man with the Gun" for example, drew different reactions. He adds, "I played it for a lot of my friends, and I wouldn't tell them anything about and I would just love to get their interpretation of it, because their interpretations of it were just as real as mine."

Even as Devvarman's life as a coach and broadcast expert, he says music will be a constant. He's not fooling himself about how hard it is to make it in music, though. While he maintains it's a passion project at the end of the day, he still has some goals. "Have I dreamt of playing my songs to an audience that wants to be there and listen? Yeah, it's like one of the most fun things to do," he says. Fully aware that making it in music is worlds apart from making it on the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) circuit, he's still keen to give it a crack, regardless of the results. "I'm yet to test the market, let's just say that," Devvarman adds. ANURAG TAGAT

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Reviews

Music

SREMMLIFE IS THE VERY BEST LIFE

Hip-hop duo Rae Sremmurd keep the vibe going on their excellent fourth album

By BRITTANY SPANOS

HEAR THIS

Rae Sremmurd

Sremm4Life

INTERSCOPE

Rae sremmurd are party starters first and foremost. Their 2015 debut, *SremmLife,* burned bright with blockbuster singles like "No Flex Zone," "This Could Be Us," and "No Type," still club staples to this day thanks to the Tupelo, Mississippi, brothers' exuberant charisma and Mike WiLL Made-It's slick production. They were ahead of the curve, too, on viral challenges like "Black Beatles."

It's been a few years since we've heard Swae Lee and Slim Jxmmi make music together. Their last album, 2018's *SR3MM,* was mostly a soft launch of their solo careers, but they're back in full force as a united front for *Sremm4Life,* a tight statement from the two that sees them continue to grow and expand the unique sonic world they've invented. →

ILLUSTRATION BY
Alim Smith

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→ RAE SREMMURD

The songs on their latest continue to showcase the interplay between the two sides of the brothers: Slim Jxmmi's tougher edge continues to mingle well with Swae Lee's softer, sung-rap delivery. It kicks off with the hazy "Origami," a tribute to all the "hotties" of their past, present, and future that asks the extremely apt question, "How you have a party/And not invite us?" It's something we've all asked in their absence. "Royal Flush" is addictive with its horn-driven loop full of quick one-liners ("I just shit on my ex/Now that's a royal flush") that feel classically Sremm.

Carrying the album, though, is the romantic streak the boys have. It's what made previous standout tracks like "This Could Be Us" so enduring and beloved. "Tanisha (Pump That)" is a highlight, a saccharine dose of pure pop that goes down easy and lingers in your ears long after. "Flaunt It/Cheap" features an old-school beat and kicks off with Slim Jxmmi taking the lead, rapping swiftly over record scratches before Swae Lee swoops in with a swaggering slowdown. It's an instant classic in their catalog worthy of any and all party playlists. "Sexy" provides a healthy dose of humor and fun in the middle of the LP, a bit of a spiritual Right Said Fred reinvention, with the two celebrating how good they look and why those looks make them so superior: "You can tell I think I'm sexy/And average things just don't impress me/And I can't smoke no reggie/Do what I want 'cause I'm sexy."

The Eighties and Nineties hip-hop-beat references on the album open up a world of opportunity for the group: They're clearly having the most fun lyrically as they update the past. Ideally, there's a future where they see where that thread takes them. The album loses some steam in between such clearly excellent moments, with tracks like "Bend Ya Knees" going through the TikTok-bait motions and losing the charm that makes Rae Sremmurd so original.

But it all ends on a high note, with the industrial emo of "ADHD Anthem (Too Many Emotions)." The song is deeply un-Rae Sremmurd yet still works: a depression banger that can't help but make you smile a bit at how catchy it is. It's something only Slim Jxmmi and Swae Lee can do so well. ®

METALLICA'S WISE FURY

The band delivers some of the deepest, hardest-hitting music it has ever made By KORY GROW

Metallica
72 Seasons
BLACKENED RECORDINGS

Yellow and black are the colors of caution signs, fallout shelters, and "Baby on Board" placards — warnings of imminent menace and catastrophe if you don't get your shit together. So it's fitting that Metallica would adopt the color scheme for the cover of *72 Seasons,* their meditation of sorts on the cruelty of youth and the dangers of growing up. Those subjects are nothing new to them (see "The Unforgiven," "Dyers Eve"), but now that frontman James Hetfield and his bandmates hover around age 60, they're seeing their journey to adulthood differently.

On their 12th full-length album, Metallica remember their formative years of going "full speed or nothin'," a lyric Hetfield reuses from the band's 1983 debut, *Kill 'Em All,* on "Lux Æterna," and also feeling "broken, beat, and scarred," a line from 2008's *Death Magnetic* that shows up on the lumbering "Room of Mirrors."

Metallica have always been masters of corpulent, groove-heavy riffs and labyrinthine song structures, but now, with more than 40 years of experience, they play with more purpose than in their speed-demon days. On "You Must Burn!," a tune that recalls their Black Album hit "Sad But True," Hetfield sings, "Question yourself, you may learn/Who's the next witch you must burn," before Metallica dip into an eerie bridge with ghostlike vocals that don't sound like anything the thrashers have recorded before.

On "Too Far Gone?," which has a punky, Misfits-influenced vibe with its fluttering guitar attacks, Hetfield asks, "Am I too far gone to save?/Help me make it through the day," and on "Sleepwalk My Life Away," he wonders, "Should I fall down, I fall down/Would you come, you come 'round?" Whether works of fiction or expressions of real-life vulnerability — since Metallica's last album, Hetfield both reentered treatment for addiction and divorced his wife of 25 years — the tracks on *72 Seasons* show an alpha male breaking the facade of brash metal rage as he searches for his own truth.

The questioning culminates on "Inamorata," a sprawling, 11-minute jam that slowly uncoils with sludgy, snarling riffs as Hetfield sings insightfully, "Misery, she needs me/Oh, but I need her more." The track is a master class in melancholy. It's Metallica's longest-ever song, but it never feels boring, since Hetfield's agony sounds authentic. Making it through those first 72 seasons may have been torture for Metallica, but now they're just realizing they survived the apocalypse to share their wisdom. ®

BREAKING

Pheelz's Sweet Afrobeats Celebration

NIGERIAN AFROBEATS artist Pheelz was at a low point last year, when he posted a bit of his song "Finesse" on TikTok. The elegant track blew up. Pretty soon, he was performing at the BET Awards. "Finesse" is a highlight of Pheelz's first U.S. major-label release, the EP *Pheelz Good.* It's a showcase for his ability to create easygoing intimacy. "Electricity," a track with Afrobeats star Davido, is a radiant centerpiece, and Phleez shows his versatility, going from the low talking of "Stand By You" to the buoyant crooning of "Pheelz Like Summer" to the infectious self-celebration "Pablo Escobar." He's earned his victory lap. JON DOLAN

PREVIOUS PAGE: ILLUSTRATION BASED ON IMAGES BY PRINCE WILLIAMS/GETTY IMAGES. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: TIM SACCENTI; OSAGIE IGUNMA

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Fresh Indie Picks

Catch up on the latest releases from independent acts

By David Britto

Rajamani Ayyer – *Mayhem*

Bhopal-bred multi-instrumentalist, composer-producer and vocalist Rajamani Ayyer is now out with his debut EP, the four-track *Mayhem*. The record features a dystopian soundscape with plenty of tension building up as the tracks progress, before we hear fiery riffs on the title track. The EP then closes out with a ballad called "Elegy."

Kamakshi Khanna, Pranay Parti – *"Titli"*

Just a month after releasing her ukulele-aided track "Breathe," Mumbai-based singer-songwriter Kamakshi Khanna is now out with a brand new single, the dream-pop offering "Titli." The artist's latest song features composer-producer and keyboardist Pranay Parti and includes lush soundscapes that tie in R&B, soul music and pop. Khanna's effervescent vocals shine bright throughout the two-and-a-half-minute track. There's also a music video starring Khanna that's been released to accompany the song, in which she's seen performing "Titli" while riding a cycle, lying down in a park and strolling on a beach. In a statement the singer said, "[It is] a song about a love that feels safe. It celebrates the kind of relationship where the rush and butterflies come from communication, honesty and the courage to be vulnerable without any fear of judgement."

@PRECISELYPICTURESQUE (KHANNA); COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

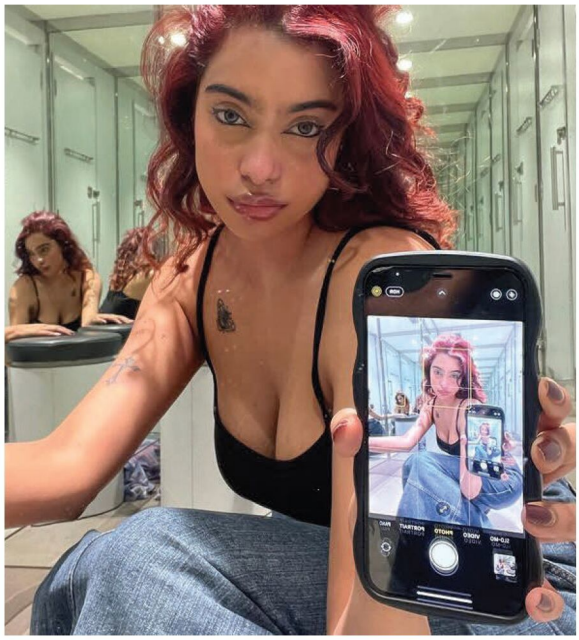
Fresh Indie Picks.indd 26 13/04/23 3:31 PM

Natasha Noorani – *"Matlabi"*

Lahore singer-songwriter Natasha Noorani's fourth single off her upcoming album RONAQ comes in the shape of the electro-pop track "Matlabi," co-written by fellow artist Zeerak Ahmed. The song features slick production chops by Talal Qureshi, Noorani's effervescent vocals that shine throughout as well as crisp melodies. There's also a chic music video – directed by AR Malik – which has been released to accompany the track. In a statement, Noorani said, "It ["Matlabi"] illustrates the loss of oneself, the period of self-reflection and the journey back to solace. It deals with themes of the burden of generational trauma carried by women and matriarchs."

Apoorva – *"Journal"*

Two years on since releasing her bouncy and fizz-filled single "Pisces Energy," Bengaluru singer-songwriter/producer Apoorva is now back with fresh new music via the trap-leaning pop track "Journal," produced by Lost Hero. Apoorva displays lush and dreamy backup singing which makes for good ear candy while her lead vocals showcase a hint of rapping, droning and melodious moments that sit well on the 90-second track.



Mali – *Apple Music Home Session*

As part of an *Apple Music Home Session*, Chennai-bred and Mumbai-based singer-songwriter Maalavika Manoj aka Mali reimagines two of her songs to create bone chilling and piano-aided versions of her tracks "Absolute" and "Mundane," both off 2021's full-length debut album Caution to the Wind. The songs are far from the synth-pop heard on Mali's album and instead offer a more emotional approach wherein her vocals and lyrics take center stage. To close, Mali 'Rickrolls' us with a sublime cover of Rick Astley's 1987 hit "Never Gonna Give You Up."

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; UMAR NADEEM (NOORANI); REMA CHAUDHARY (MALI)

Fresh Indie Picks.indd 27 13/04/23 3:31 PM

Dot. – *"Indigo"*

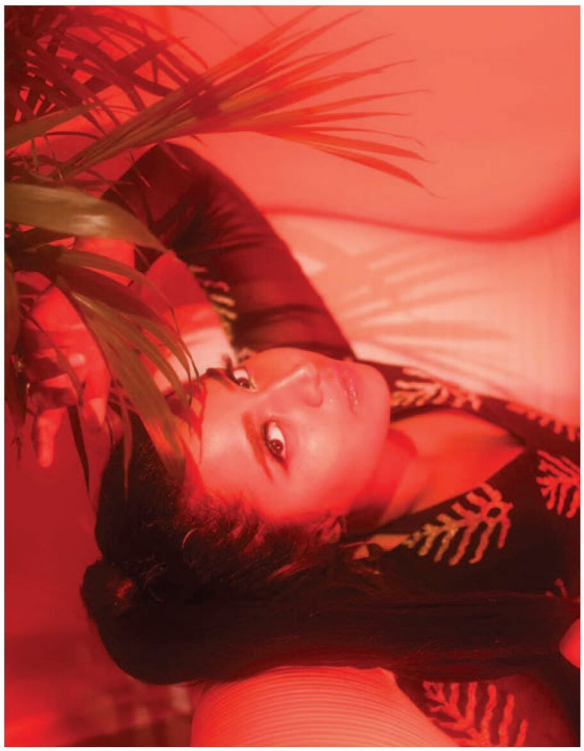
Not long after her collaboration with Ahmedabad-based guitarist and composer Chirag Todi on "Spiced Lemonade," New Delhi-bred and Bengaluru-based singer-songwriter Aditi Saigal aka Dot. is now out with a fresh single, the easy-going pop-folk song "Indigo." The fabulously written track includes slick production, quirky lyrics, Dot.'s breezy and smooth vocal delivery and more. The artist said in a statement, "This song is about letting go of your ideas of what other people might think about your work, [to] try and just live in the thing that you've created, so for me, that was the fantasy world that I was building."

ABHEET ANAND (DOT.); COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Sick Society – *"Bloody Curse"*

Bengaluru alt-rockers Sick Society's first piece of new music since their 2022 album *Confession of The Fate* comes in the shape of the rousing "Bloody Curse." The band stick to their heavy sound on the new song with chunky bass pops, distorted guitars, pulsating drums and steely vocals. In a statement, the group said, "When one's destiny is determined by their inner demons, it's always chaos. This song depicts such a scenario where a man is cursed by his inner demons to take down the whole world, creating chaos and recreating all the devastating rules that's made by people, to take control of people itself. The cursed man called himself a devil."

Fresh Indie Picks.indd 28 13/04/23 3:31 PM



Achanté – *"Serotonin Skies"*

Mumbai-bred and Toronto-based singer-songwriter Chantelle Menezes aka Achanté's newest single is the gentle piano-aided "Serotonin Skies." The soothing ballad also includes a string section, vocal overlays, mellifluous harmonies as well as captivating and emotional lead vocals from Achanté. In a statement, the artist said, "I wrote 'Serotonin Skies' three years ago for a long-ago love, but over time, space, two continents, and the many people who have been part of its journey, its meaning has evolved to become an expansive ode – to love, reborn."

Shefali Alvares, Denny, Aashiq Khan, Mandy Gill – *"Tanhai"*

Mumbai singer Shefali Alvares recently released the first single off her three-track forthcoming debut EP *Distorted Dystopia* in the shape of the jumpy "Tanhai." The EP is in collaboration with songwriter and music director Denny and "Tanhai" also features artists such as Aashiq Kha and Mandy Gill. The straight-up pop banger includes strong vocals and an upbeat dancey tempo. Alvares said in a statement, "This is my electronic side of life and I am infusing it into my new music. It is me — my sound — and I believe the sound of new India."

Tyesha Kohli – *"Fallen"*

New Delhi-bred and Boston-based singer-songwriter Tyesha Kohli is out with a brand-new acoustic ditty entitled "Fallen." Kohli's lush guitar strums and choice of chords sit perfectly with the song's vocal melody that emits a sense of nostalgia and hope. The artist also delivers an impeccable vocal performance as she paints a beautiful story with her picturesque lyrics. "'Fallen' is a haunting and emotional song that tells the story of being in a relationship with a narcissistic person and feeling unloved and even unworthy of love. The song truly feels like my most powerful songwriting yet and it's an expression of the emotional turmoil that comes from being in a toxic relationship. I hope it resonates with anyone who has ever felt unloved and unworthy of love," Kohli said in a statement.

COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS; @FILMONAFILM (KOHLI)

Fresh Indie Picks.indd 29 13/04/23 3:31 PM

K-DRAMAS THAT REVERSE ARCHETYPICAL GENDER REPRESENTATIONS

While some K-dramas portray gender prejudices, others break gender standards by opposing the traditional ideas of femininity, as seen in 'Coffee Prince,' 'Hyna,' 'My Name' and more

By Debashree Dutta

According to a common school of thought, a girl is expected to be "feminine," "naive" and "weak," traits of the so-called "desirable woman." I imagine that occasionally a strong female character is deliberately made to look incompetent or helpless (in particular situations), possibly to allow a male character to step in and save the day. An assertive badass woman? Not very alluring. While some K-dramas commonly portray these kinds of gender prejudices and preconceptions, there is a clear break from the gender standards that many other K-dramas have been promoting by opposing the traditional ideas of femininity. *Coffee Prince*, for example, was a major hit in 2007. It showed the strength of an atypical heroine, setting a new standard by questioning gender expectations. It sharply demonstrated a woman's power while tackling social concerns in Korea. By flipping conventional gender roles, the female protagonist's unique portrayal as a tomboy, in contrast to many K-dramas where the plot revolves around a feminine makeover to attract attention, contributed to its appeal.

K-Dramas that Reverse Archetypical Gender Representations.indd 30 13/04/23 7:38 PM

K-Dramas that Reverse Archetypical Gender Representations.indd 31 13/04/23 7:38 PM

K-DRAMAS THAT REVERSE ARCHETYPICAL GENDER REPRESENTATIONS

Go Eun-chan (Yoon Eun-hye), the heroine in *Coffee Prince*, is a martial arts expert and the family's primary provider. She is unapologetic about her appearance or circumstances. Till the very end of the drama, Eun-chan chooses to wear baggy clothes and short hair and despite difficulties, never gives up on her dreams. I admire her fortitude since, at one point in the drama, she declines to wed Choi Han-kyul (Gong Yoo) before pursuing her career while also insisting on repaying her loan to him with interest even though they are dating. The best part? Han-kyul loves her for who she is and never coerces her into changing anything.

In a sexist society, many K-dramas feature strong women who defy stigmas, aggression, and traditional family structures. One such distinct woman who goes beyond the conventional depiction of a gentle gender identity is Kang Soo-jin (Lee Bo-young), from the 2018 drama *Mother*. Soo-jin is depicted as a high-school teacher who abducts a student to keep her safe from domestic abuse. While rescuing her, she also rescues herself in the story, notwithstanding a myriad of challenges along the way. I like how the series addresses the image of a tough woman who, despite having no biological connection to a child, overcomes all obstacles to keep the child safe – becoming the "mother" eventually. Soo-jin provides a role model; she is humane, fair, compassionate, and potent – the true embodiment of a real hero.

Women's ambition for authority at work and the usual notion of prioritizing family responsibilities are often at odds. The dichotomy between the conventional and contemporary ideals of women is reflected in some K-dramas' portrayal of professional women by conveying both opposing and prevailing discourses. Jung Geum-ja (Kim Hye-soo), the slick lawyer in the legal K-drama *Hyena* (2020), plays hardball and walks a fine line between right and wrong and the law in pursuing material gain no matter what it takes. Her biggest opponent is Yoon Hee-jae (Ju Ji-hoon), a seasoned attorney with a keen mind, but he lacks Jung's courage and is frequently outsmarted by her.

> "The advent of the power girl, who can push the boundaries and take on challenges with ease, may be attributed to increasing recognition of unconventional roles for women and awareness of the polarising nature of female attributes."

Geum-ja is ruthless, independent, ambitious, and burning with the drive to succeed. She is also deceptive and skilled in her line of work. She is impressive in that she never backs down from achieving her goals, not even by utilizing the man who is her professional rival for her own pleasure. Her amazing grit in attempting to make things work is admirable. She is one of the most resilient characters I've seen in a K-drama, and while her antics are sometimes condemned, I feel good about a woman like that – solid in her abilities, and never ashamed about what she accomplishes in a male-dominated culture.

Masculinity has frequently been emphasized in dramas and films, dismissing any erosion of gender barriers. A piece on gender and the action heroine by author Jeffrey A. Brown asserts that, as opposed to men, women in 1980s action movies were

merely meant to be saved as proof of the hero's prowess. Even so, as the genre evolved over time, action heroines made a more prominent appearance, and I reckon K-dramas followed suit in that regard. For example, *Secret Garden* (2010), *Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok-joo* (2016), *Strong Girl Do Bong-soon* (2017), *Happiness* (2021), and *Sisyphus: The Myth* (2021) are just a few of the many works that include heroic female characters capable of defending themselves and slaying enemies.

The advent of the power girl, who can push the boundaries and take on challenges with ease, may be attributed to increasing recognition of unconventional roles for women and awareness of the polarising nature of female attributes. Think of Yoon Ji-woo (Han So-hee) from *My Name* (2021). To track down her father's murderer, she teams up with a crime lord and the cops to exact revenge. Her loss and heartbreak are palpable because of the emotional upheavals she goes through before and after her father's death. She is, nevertheless, the fighter, shamed and mistreated, yet she rises from the ashes like a phoenix. Ji-woo's confrontations with the evildoers are harrowing, yet she crushes them to dust like a warrior queen.

The *New York Times* bestselling author Melanie Dickerson's historical romance, *A Viscount's Proposal*, contains a passage that reads one of the protagonist Leorah Langdon's quotes that I found very inspiring. She says,"I'm proud of my carefree behavior...I am boisterous when I choose to be, and simply because I don't behave like a wan and fainting female who has not a thought in her head except try to attract an eligible suitor... I shall not conform to how you or anyone else tells me I should behave. I am answerable only to God."

Leorah is intolerant of the shallow hypocrisy and pointless regulations of Regency society, especially when it comes to women. This takes us to the lovely Yeo Mi-ran (Kim Ok-vin) from the 2023 drama *Love to Hate You* who hates surrendering to men.

She fights for justice in a patriarchal culture by employing the techniques she learned in martial arts. We also witness a movie star, Nam Kang-ho (Teo Yoo), who has an unfavorable opinion of women (until they are forced to date each other, at least). I dig the drama's treatment of the idea that being a badass and not minding what people think of you as a woman is totally fine, and that a woman like that may still look attractive in her own way, attractive enough to entice even the hottest star. A conversation between Mi-ran and Kang-ho that features the latter expressing his dissatisfaction with Mi-ran for acting as a savior and suffering consequences is one of my favorites. He asks, "There were a lot of guys back there. Why did you, a woman, have to do that?" To which she answers, "A woman? Nam Kang-ho, if someone saves you from danger, are you really going to argue why a woman came to save you? If your life's in danger and a woman comes to your rescue, are you going to say, 'What's the matter with you? You're a woman.' That's how you sound. I mean, why would you care if it's a man or woman if they helped to save your life?... The woman is weak and needs help, and the man swoops into save her. Ugh, I hate that." The exchange is a great example of how society still perceives women and their responsibilities in today's world. Additionally, Mi-ran's past and the fact that her sex life becomes a discussion point are a testament to Korean culture, which (like many other societies) wields conservative values in many other areas, especially the treatment of women. Kang-ho, though, is unquestionably a great guy who loves Mi-ran in every capacity. That sets an example. ®

PHOTO COURTESY OF HANCINEMA; NETFLIX; VIKI; HANDOUT

K-Dramas that Reverse Archetypical Gender Representations.indd 33 13/04/23 7:38 PM

IN NYC, SHAPING A NEW TRUE NORTH OF DINING OUT

PERHAPS WHAT WE NEED IS TO NORMALIZE A BREAKFAST OF TAMAGOYAKI, A SOUP-DUMPLING LUNCH, CHICKEN STEW AND FUFU AFTER A LONG DAY, AND A MIDNIGHT SAMOSA SNACK

By SOLEIL NATHWANI

When I moved to New York in 1998, for some it was still a minor rite of passage to make it past the velvet rope at the Royalton Hotel, down the signature royal blue carpet, and sink into a white chrome-legged chair in the already sunken Philippe Starck-designed lobby bar, all so a blasé server might deign to take an order. The bar and adjacent New American restaurant, once crowned Club Condé because of the frequency of Condé Nast masthead power lunches held there, were symbolic of a major shift in hotel trends, something of a signifier of the city's pulse. Ian Schrager, the man synonymous with the cool-ification of hotels, launched the refurbished Royalton in 1988 (it was built as an apartment hotel ninety years prior), on the heels of the success he and his partner Steve Rubell had experienced with the launch of Morgan's Hotel in 1984. Morgan's, which birthed the moniker 'boutique hotel', was also home to Jeffrey Chodorow's Asia de Cuba, a restaurant as famous for having doormen with headsets as it was for blending Chinese and Cuban cuisine, a novelty in the beige landscape of hotel dining. All of it had heralded a sea change in hotels and their restaurants.

That it was Schrager who established a new vanguard of hotel-as-destination by transforming the staid gilt-edged lobby into a starry scene and expanding the food horizons of hotel menus, is unsurprising. Schrager and Rubell's hotels were a next act to their iconic Studio 54, a nightclub that was equally cultural phenomenon, playing second home to Andy Warhol's Factory and capturing the cachet and hedonism of the '70s disco era. Little had transformed the hotel landscape since a first wave of glamorous hotels in New York at the turn of the previous century. These Gilded Age buildings that counted the Waldorf Astoria, The Plaza and the Astor amongst their ranks were plush stages for New Yorkers to bask in wealth amassed during the industrial revolution. When a more contemporary New York cried for a different energy, Schrager met it by pushing back on the pretensions of the grand hotels whose calendars were dotted with white-glove weddings and blue-blood debutante balls.

The move from old-world capitalists to new-age cool kids that Schrager ushered in seems to be giving way to another transformation in hotels, one that I am truly excited about. As the city comes back to life, under the post-pandemic gaze of a value shift, many luxe hotels are revitalizing themselves through a culinary evolution that prioritizes a diverse range of food cultures over the Eurocentric menus that are mainstays of luxury hotel restaurants. In doing so, and in putting the heft of money, real estate, marketing and a built-in clientele behind their chefs, newer hotel projects are elevating cuisines that comprise a sliver of dining-out bucks in New York or are the domain of smaller cucinas, when they have visibility at all. In turn, talented chefs with regional knowledge and a desire to revel in a heritage and reveal foodways, are making these hotels culinary destinations for locals and tourists alike.

Schrager, who championed Asia de Cuba decades prior, seems to have been intentional about this shift in 2021 when he reopened the PUBLIC - his Lower East Side property. In 2017 the PUBLIC had debuted a tie-up with famed French chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, along with a smorgasbord-like menu. When the PUBLIC re-opened post-covid, the team had thoughtfully reinvented its kitchen via Peru. The hotel's new restaurant, Popular, brings together Peruvian chef Diego Muñoz, whose Astrid

Pop Stuff.indd 34 13/04/23 5:45 PM

Tatiana Staff with Chef Kwame (center) in Lady and Butler designed uniforms.

Y Gastón in Lima is on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list, with Michelin-starred local John Fraser. In reflecting the waves of global immigration to Peru - Incan, Spanish, Moorish, African, Italian, Chinese and Japanese, Popular echoes an adventurous palate that I hope is becoming a hallmark of contemporary hotel stays. The opening, orchestrated by longtime Schrager collaborator and hospitality maven Ben Pundole (also the founder of award-winning future forward travel site AHotelLife.com) called to the PUBLIC's brand as playful luxury, debuting a spot filled with blond wood and foliage and nodding to the emphasis on the warmer climes of the Global South.

Multi-stranded influences at Popular deliver a truly flavourful Peruvian menu. Divided into vegetables, wok and wood-fired, dishes are so delectably paired with dressings that they convey the slight sensuality of a slip dress. Fried oyster mushrooms with ahi panca yogurt and cilantro are a delicate dance of umami and tart. The indulgent creaminess of roasted sweet potato is balanced with the crunch of toasted hazelnuts. In the wok section, sticky prawns chow mein are noteworthy for a teasing blend of chew and tang. Of the wood-fired mains, octopus with potato cream and duck with lima bean cream stand out for using pureed vegetables to impart depth and decadence, while drawing brightness from a simple spice rub or ceviche sauce. The stars of the menu are the ceviches themselves, also available at the adjacent Cantina and Pisco Bar. Variations include a sparkling salmon tiradito and a creative roasted celeriac with hibiscus and coconut. The Pisco Bar, home to Popular's cocktail program, highlights the namesake South American brandy and opens up a new world of libations.

The trend towards restaurant openings in New York that eschew New American, French or Italian menus for cuisines that have infrequently occupied prime boutique hotel real estate includes: more Latin-American fare at the Freehand Hotel's Comodo in Gramercy, a Japanese grill at Vestry in the Dominick Hotel in Tribeca, and Israeli flavours on offer at the Hoxton in Williamsburg, all well worth a stay on a travel itinerary, or at minimum, a dinner reservation.

Comodo opened in late 2021 after new owners at the Freehand Hotel partnered with Tamy Rofe and Felipe Donnelly, whose 2012 Soho restaurant is Comodo's namesake. The Freehand, occupying a historic 1928 building that was once the George Washington Hotel, at a busy intersection on 23rd and Lexington, is an unexpected reprieve from teeming Manhattan streets and ideal for a city stay that calls for being both in the mix and at a snug remove. Tucked inside a corner of the building, the restaurant's Latin American influences are right at home amongst the warmth of stained-glass panels, cherry wood beams, a sumptuous bar and soothing lighting.

This new Comodo feels more ambitious and experimental than the original. The menu draws from Mexico, Brazil, Columbia and Peru, without ever feeling cobbled together. Too much of the excellent pao de quijeo - a Brazilian cheese-filled bread - is only a bad idea if it leaves you with no room for smoky wild mushroom tacos dusted with habanero ash or their coffee-rubbed pork counterparts. My favourite amongst the small plates was a rich

Pop Stuff.indd 35 13/04/23 5:45 PM

Clockwise from top: Popular Interior; Vestry Hokkaido Scallops; Comodo Tablescape

COURTESY OF POPULAR; COURTESY OF VESTRY; LOUISE PALMER

mole paired with baby eggplant and expertly undercut with feta. The large plates have something for all moods; for comfort, the achiote chicken on verdant green rice and for decadence, the tilefish with a buttery squid ink risotto and balancing lime zest. Sweets are a must here. The churros donuts with Mexican chocolate sauce and the coconut yucca cake are unfussy yet transporting indulgences. Try both and dance off dessert at the hotel's Georgia Room, or wind down with a mezcal-infused cocktail at Bar Calico upstairs.

For a swankier evening or special occasion, Vestry, classically-trained chef Shaun Hergatt's take on Japanese inflected cuisine, is a dream in impossibly high-ceilinged digs and a differentiating take on Japan's food culture, given the recent growth in sushi and omakase menus in New York. Situated where Soho flirts with Tribeca, in the David Rockwell designed Dominick Hotel, Vestry opened in late 2020 and quickly garnered a Michelin star. The food is too pretty to eat and too delicious to resist. In the raw section, beets with preserved tomatoes and feta, and chutoro with yuzu, wasabi and radish taste just-plucked from land and sea. The menu changes frequently and a delicious corn risotto has been replaced by one of saffron, tomato confit and pine nuts, that I am sure is equally refreshing. Creativity and frame-worthy presentation aside, Vestry's strength lies is in letting superior ingredients do the work and to this end their Binchō-tan (Japanese white charcoal) grill reigns supreme over the menu

Pop Stuff.indd 36 13/04/23 5:45 PM

with a seafood focus that gives salmon a cracker-crisp skin and cooks scallops to smoky perfection.

Across the river in Williamsburg, Israeli food at the Hoxton is one of many reasons Brooklynites could cite for claiming the better borough. Indian-born, UK based entrepreneur Sharan Pasricha's Hoxton hotel landed here with a splash in 2018, the first U.S. location of the rapidly expanding East London brand. Williamsburg has been post-industrial ever since a landscape of slick residential buildings and artisanal grocers replaced its warehouses but, to their credit, design team Perkins Eastman maintained elements of the Rosenbach Water Tower Factory that formerly occupied the Hoxton site. The hotel's heart is an old brick carriage house, punctured with arches, which makes a focal point for a sprawling lobby that houses a bar, coffee bar and restaurant. Surrounding it, an impressive staircase and high black steel beams contrast with parquet flooring and scattered furniture to convey a feeling of industrial chic that risks an eye-roll inducing ubiquity in Williamsburg, but feels organic and even cheeky at the Hoxton.

The hotel capitalizes on its space to show off its two restaurants, Laser Wolf on the rooftop and K'Far in the lobby, both inspired by Israeli chef and James Beard honoree Michael Solomonov. Reaping the benefits of a waterfront Williamsburg location, Laser Wolf (named for one of Solomonov's many spots in his hometown Philadelphia) boasts unobstructed, panoramic views of the Manhattan skyline. Nothing goes better with a crisp autumn chill or the onset of summer than kebabs over live coals and Laser Wolf delivers. Whilst the skewered meats are exceptional, the spiced whole trout and the eggplant halves with sour cherry and walnuts are standouts in their own right. A sunset meal is incomplete without the endless supply of salatim - vegan mezze that come as a first course and which you'll want to keep on hand. This is not your standard mezze; the fennel-spiced oranges and the pineapple with celery are stiff competition for babaganoush and hummus classics. The salatim arrive in eleven round tins on a platter reminiscent of a Gujrati thali, and celebrate food sharing in a way that will truly scratch a covid-induced itch for togetherness. The single dessert on the Laser Wolf menu - a brown-sugar soft serve with a strong dose of sesame, is halva's delicious iced cousin.

Downstairs, K'far is an all-day café and bar with a full dinner service that feels cozy in winter and connects to a leafy atrium for prime summer seating. Divided into small and large plates, the menu works equally well for individual portions, in contrast to the designed-for-sharing menu at Laser Wolf. Challah rolls with labneh butter are a guilty pleasure that I was intrigued to see could be made even more decadent with the addition of caviar. A combination of small plates can come together for a gorgeously varied meal and amongst them the Palestinian lamb tartare and fennel caesar make for exquisitely layered spice and texture. Amongst the large plates the cod chraime and the za'atar brick chicken with green tahina offer an appealing combination of comfort food with complex flavour.

The flurry of hotel restaurant launches meeting post-pandemic demand for travel and leisure have not all turned to the South or East for food inspiration, yet even amongst the ones that have stuck with Eurocentric cuisine, I've noticed an inclination lean into foodways that are under explored. This was particularly apparent in two of the most highly touted openings of 2022; Koloman - the Austrian inspired restaurant that replaced chef April Bloomfield's gastropub The Breslin in the Ace Hotel, and the Hotel Chelsea's revamped El Quijote restaurant, which maintained the original eatery's Basque Country spirit along with it 1930s roots and name.

From left:Laser Wolf Salatim; Laser Wolf Chef Mike Solomonov

MICHAEL PERISCO; COLBY KINGSTON

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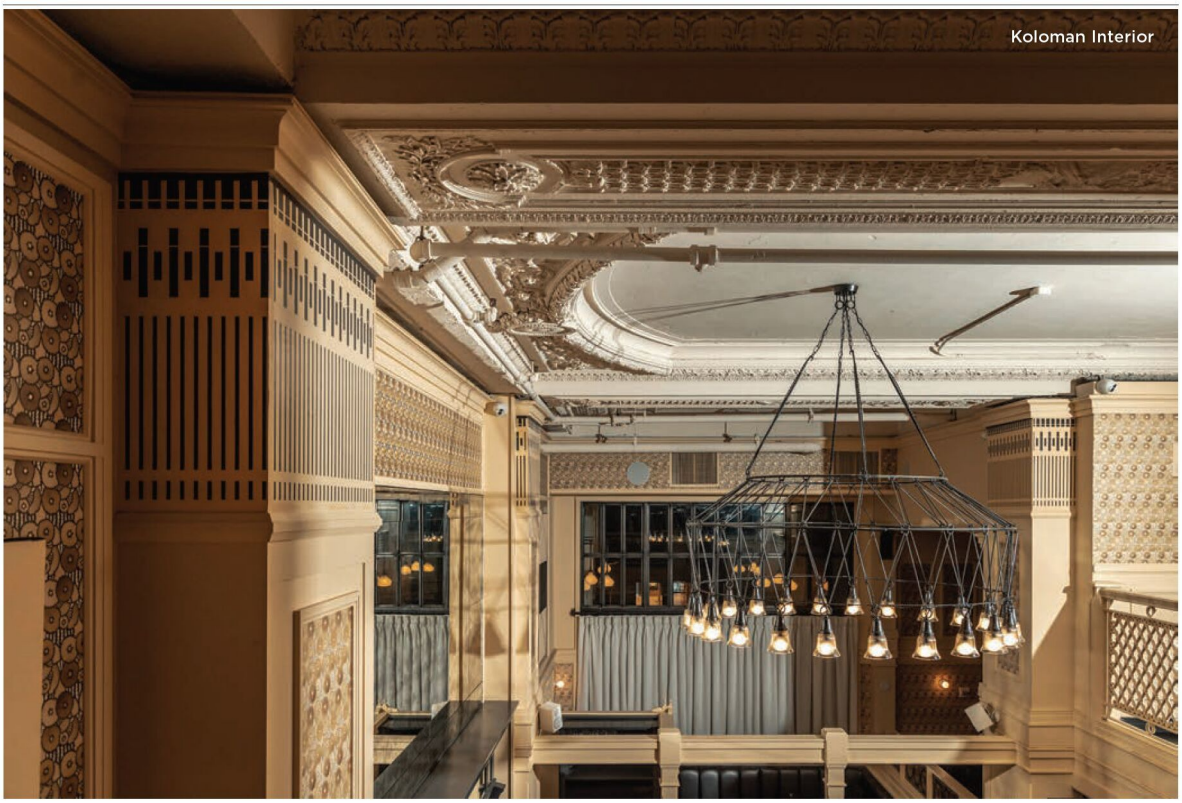
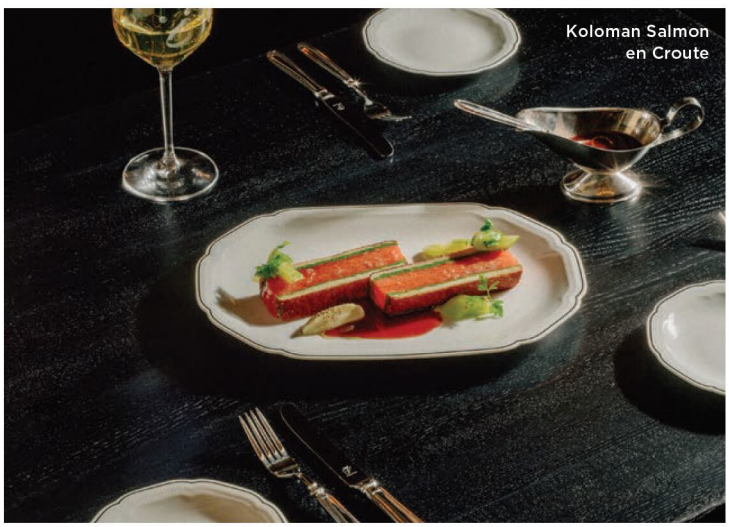


Koloman Interior

When the Ace Hotel arrived in Manhattan in 2009, occupying the 1904 landmark Hotel Breslin, it became something of a magnet for a neighborhood that had seen its heyday in the swinging '20s. The area, earlier known as Tin Pan Alley – a locus of popular culture once thronging with musicians, had ceded its place to a growing and spreading New York. The Ace established a footprint for what became an explosion of hotels and restaurants in the revitalized district, now known as Nomad. Meanwhile, a little further south, the iconic Hotel Chelsea, an enduring New York landmark and onetime home to a name-check of greats - Leonard Cohen, Patti Smith, Bob Dylan, Arthur Miller and more - survived to tell the tale of a careful restoration, bones intact, under the auspices of Sean MacPherson and his partners, hoteliers behind The Bowery, The Jane Hotel and others. By reimagining iconic spaces in novel ways, these projects made new waves in New York's boutique hotel landscape after Schrager's eighties and nineties push against the past. Now, their newly opened flagship restaurants speak to a continued evolution that brings focus to more varied cuisines.



Koloman Salmon en Croute

COURTESY OF KOLOMAN; NICK JOHNSON

Koloman replaces The Breslin's sultry British barroom energy, once infused with the aroma of nose-to-tail pig creations, with a breezy Viennese makeover. The former den-like space at the Ace boasts eggshell white walls, ceilings and moldings. The creamy expanse is spliced only with fine black lines etched on wall paper, or forming the backs of chairs, elegant light fixtures and the hands of an otherwise transparent clock floating behind a bar that is chicer than its patrons. Koloman is named for Austrian artist Koloman Moser, part of the Viennese Secession movement, founded in the late 19th century, on the premise that art should expand out of the frame to include furniture, textiles and design. Indeed, there is something hypnotic in a space in which the oval molding, speaks to the circular light fixture, which riffs off geometric wall prints, whose shapes coalesce on an elliptical dinner plate, on which a perfectly rectangular salmon en croûte sits halved in ying-yang harmony. Space that makes you want to linger and food that insists on being savoured

Pop Stuff.indd 38 13/04/23 5:45 PM

are the rare combination that Koloman has struck like the arms of its bar-clock folding over each other.

The restaurant comes via EHV (from Rohit Khattar and Rishiv Khattar), the hospitality company behind the top-ranked Indian Accent, Comorin and Hosa, and is designed by London based Russell Sage Studio. Chef-partner Markus Glocker, of the award-winning Bâtard, exhibits the classical training he received in London, Munich and Berlin and the food sensibility of growing up working in his family's Vienna hotel. Glocker showcases Austrian cuisine, often overshadowed by its neighbours, so that it glimmers through fastidious French underpinnings.

Meals at Koloman unfold with verve. Duck liver parfait has the silky interior of an egg-yolk. Spices in the celery root tartare are symphonic; mustard sparkling over mellower notes of parmesan and tarragon. Golden-crusted schnitzel paired with tart lingonberries and bright cucumber is the mouthful equivalent of the sun dropping into the Danube. I saved the beef and duck for another time, but watched them sail by and marveled over by fellow diners, with a gallerist's admiration. The deserts, from Emiko Chisholm (formerly of Balthazar), are exceptional, each one oozing old-world charm made over. Butternut squash cheesecake with burnt sage streusel, anyone? The most endearing thing about my visit to Koloman, is that a server set their version of a white negroni on my coaster and proceeded to spritz essence of gentian over it from a crystal atomizer, all without an air of formality, only the ebullience of a good time in the making. So unexpectedly and delightfully camp, I had to have another.

El Quijote in the Hotel Chelsea, is something altogether different, a city stalwart that first opened its doors almost a century ago. After closing during hotel renovations in 2018, it re-opened in the Spring of 2022, with the same neon-red sign, new management and the reawakened tawdry splendor of a place where Hendrix and Joplin once sat before pitchers of Sangria. While smaller now, El Quijote has not had the transformation that nostalgists feared, only a proper facelift. Red vinyl booths have been reupholstered, the linoleum flooring peeled back to reveal gorgeous tilework, and the dramatic Don Quixote wall mural brightened to glory. As tapas arrive, heady with the aroma of garlic and shrimp tails, this enhanced El Quijote imparts the feeling of being wrapped inside of a bullfighter's cape.

Jaime Young of Sunday Hospitality oversees an updated and carefully developed El Quijote menu. The old menu has been refreshed with a focus on Northern Spain where the Catalan, Basque and Galician regions have distinct culture, language and foodways and are home to a large portion of Spain's indigenous communities. Classic tapas – croquetas, patatas, gambas – all shimmer with an extra layer of piquancy. Blood sausage in squid Ink takes something hearty and makes it even richer. Even a simple dish like pan con tomate is invitingly pungent. El Quijote is wonderful for large yet intimate gatherings and the arroz

El Quijote
Dining Room

ERIC MEDSKER

Pop Stuff.indd 39 13/04/23 5:45 PM

Tatiana Interiors Designed by Modellus Novus

ADRIAN GAUT/COURTESY OF LINCOLN CENTER AND MODELLUS NOVUS

meloso de mariscos, a seafood rice dish, saturated with flavour, begs to be shared along with a pitcher of spice-infused, pineapple or peach laden sangria.

If New York is a melting pot, its hotel dining, in spite of these entrants, is still a way from reflecting global cuisines more fully. The stalwart New American menu, Paris-inspired brasserie, elegant Italian, modern bistro and 'classic' (as defined by whom? - we might ask) Mediterranean, remain where some of the most sought-after hotels tend to place their bets. Locanda Verde in the Greenwich Hotel, Le Coucou in 11 Howard, Ai Fiori in The Langham, Majorelle in The Lowell, The Mark Restaurant in The Mark Hotel and Le Crocodile in The Wythe are part of a long list of restaurants that, albeit first-rate, fall in those categories. And there is no shortage of splashy new additions from exceptional chefs. More recently they include Pierre Gagnaire's Fouquet's in the Hotel Barrière Fouquet's New York, whose Champs Elysees namesake is the archetype of Parisian brasseries, and Ignacio Mattos' modern bistro, Corner Bar in Nine Orchard, possibly the most talked about hotel opening of 2022. Uruguayan-born Mattos, lauded for his ability to pare and blend Italian, Spanish and Middle Eastern flavours, a skill that has earned him a deserved reputation as one of the city's most talented chefs, is set to open Amado Grill in the same location later this year. I will be trying to crash Resy to make a booking, but my hope is new openings continue to represent more global diversity.

To contemplate if that's on the horizon, it's worth considering why hotel dining became such a big trend at all and why it matters. The boutique hotel boom in New York, going back to Schrager's entry, planted the seeds of symbiotic relationships with influential chefs. At a time when hotel pioneers of the past, figures like J.W. Mariott and Conrad Hilton, had become synonymous with reliable carpeted dining rooms and cookie-cutter comfort, boutique hotels offered a stay that was part of the adventure and experience of travel. Courting influential chefs became a path to instant recognition; food and beverage became no longer simply a service, but a currency. For chefs and restaurateurs, a deal that can fund everything, from rent, to interior design, to the actual kitchen sink, can be a no-brainer especially in a city where real estate alone will eat your lunch. Hotels in New York became integral to the rising trajectory of chefs at the aforementioned eateries, and many others such as Mario Carbone and Rich Torrisi, Daniel Humm and Tom Colicchio.

Luxe hotel dining is not the ideal solution to the impossibility of sky-rocketing rent and creeping payroll that, now more than ever, makes opening a restaurant prohibitive for independent operators; gentrification has already swallowed too much of the city's charm and there is a twisted irony in debating equity in cuisines offered when food workers still struggle to make a living wage. But in a city where hotels do give chefs a way to realize their grander visions, it is worth asking which chefs and encouraging resources away from the current literal and figurative true North of fine dining, so that what might be a passing fancy for other cuisines (the Global South and East especially), becomes a structural shift. And while fancy restaurants at hotels and deep-pocketed institutions are only accessible to the few who can afford meals out and travel, they do matter because they define what is aspirational, which in turn defines where capital and attentions flows.

A major reason hotels cite for the persistent focus on Eurocentric cuisines is that their kitchens need to provide all-day meals and

Pop Stuff.indd 40 13/04/23 5:45 PM

basic room service. But perhaps what the industry needs is to normalize a breakfast of tamagoyaki, a soup-dumpling lunch, chicken stew and fufu after a long day, and a midnight samosa snack. The entrenchment of some foodways is not so different from the Hollywood myth that only a White male lead can capture a wide audience, a myth that was blown apart when the box office embraced Chadwick Boseman in Black Panther or most recently Michelle Yeoh, who became the first Asian woman to win a best actress Oscar earlier this year for her role in indie smash hit Everything Everywhere All At Once.

Indeed, hoteliers and developers need look no further than the arts for proof that big bets on under-served cuisines are viable, valuable and vital. Just months ago, in November of 2022, David Geffen Hall, home to the New York Philharmonic, reopened at Lincoln Center (site also of the Met Opera, New York City Ballet and Lincoln Center Film) after a $550 million renovation, years in the making. Geffen Hall houses the oldest symphony orchestra in the US and a predictably aging audience. Its architects, in the broadest sense, understood the importance of moving with the times and forging ties with a broader demographic. Improved acoustics inside the hall aside, the building has two major new features of note; garage door style openings that welcome audiences in to a discipline - classical music, that has historically kept people out, and a spanking new restaurant from thirty-three-year-old Nigerian-American chef, author, former Top Chef contestant and James Beard Rising Star, Kwame Onwuachi. Good luck getting a reservation: even diners coming in pre or post show have declared that the Afro-Caribbean jam to New York that Tatiana serves up, is truly the main event.

It is fitting that Bronx-born Onwuachi has crafted a whole mood into a corner of the city that has been known more for its sedate patrons than its street style by inflecting Lincoln Center with the '90s music and energy of his youth and by drawing on his roots; West Africa via Nigeria on his father's side and creole-influenced US Gulf Coast on his mother's. It is a reverent sort of homecoming when you consider that Lincoln Center stands on land that was once San Juan Hill, a vibrant Black and Puerto Rican neighborhood that was razed in the 1950s to make way for the center's opulent buildings. The kinetic energy of Tatiana's graphite walls, industrial beams, cloud-like pendant lights, open kitchen, and black crockery splashed with dishes so artful and vibrant they feel like a Kehinde Wiley on a plate, harness the past to harken to the future in a way that only seems possible when you dare to step out of your lane, or, in Onwuachi's case, claim the whole highway.

The food at Tatiana holds its own on every front – exceptional and surprising, exciting and comforting. After messing my fingers on crispy okra dripping in a honey mustard peppa sauce, I tucked into curried goat patties with green aioli and mango chutney. Delicate scallops, arranged as precisely as bowling pins held up remarkably under a jerk spice, and a red snapper, crisped to perfection in brown stew, paired blistering crunch with seductive flakiness. I opted for seafood over the much-touted short rib pastrami suya because I was already plotting a return to savour Onwuachi's take on Jewish Deli meets Nigerian street food, both a capsule of his New York and a collaborative dish which pairs executive sous-chef Nikki Dembeck's caraway cocoa bread with chef de cuisine Kamat Newman's mustard jus. The cocktail program from beverage industry veteran Don Lee is as robust as the menu. I'm partial to the LC Negroni which spices up the classic with Caribbean Sorrel and a tawny East India Sherry. The 'bodega special' dessert – brownie with a side of donut ice cream, is a genius parting shot, hinting, via evocations of traybakes and childhood hankerings, that culinary snobbery has no place in the ingredients of good food.

Those holding the keys ought to take note; Tatiana's advocates appear to have tossed the worn playbook for restaurant-as-draw, and acted with intention to signal dispensing with the old guard of upscale dining. Onwuachi and his team have rewarded them with a runaway success that puts the fine in dining. Named for Onwuachi's sister, who brought him up while their mother worked as a chef, Tatiana has all the heart of that story and menu, mood and staff that makes you want to linger as if at a great dinner party. Isn't that everything dining-out could hope for? Indeed, Tatiana is a question that has answered itself, occupying a glass corner enface the curve of Lincoln Center's iconic fountain. If Lincoln Center, with its rarified air of prestige, can reframe the story of whose food is elevated or mainstreamed, I hope more landlords and hoteliers feel similarly encouraged, so the axis of fine dining truly shifts. Inside Tatiana, a beaded metal curtain skirting floor-to-ceiling glass walls was crafted to call back to chain link fences around public playgrounds. When I looked between its chinks towards the grand buildings of the opera and the ballet, the swishing silver beads seemed to murmur that the world of upscale dining has long been overdue for a feeling of true welcome, that velvet ropes have always been passé. ®

Tatiana Tablescape

EVAN SUNG

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Pop Stuff.indd 41 13/04/23 5:45 PM

Ed Sheeran. Seriously.

When he became a dad, his 'party boy' days had to end. Then tragedy struck, forcing him to face his hidden dark side — and hit the hottest creative streak in a career full of them

By Brian Hiatt Photographs by Liz Collins

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In case there's any doubt, Ed Sheeran is well aware of the fact that he's ... Ed Sheeran.

"I'm not an idiot," he says, early in our acquaintance. "When you say in your office, 'I'm gonna go and interview Ed Sheeran,' you must get sneers. I've always been that guy."

The state of being that guy, at the least the public version of him, is a paradoxical one. Sheeran is, on the one hand, unquestionably among the 21st century's very biggest global pop superstars. That's why he's 11,000 miles from home right now, in the fenced-off, tree-lined backyard of a rented bungalow in Auckland, New Zealand, lounging in the shade his complexion demands ("I *live* in the shade"), under blue-gray skies. Later this week, he'll play to some 100,000 people over two shows here. His last tour was the highest-grossing of all time, until his mentor, Elton John, surpassed it; this one, somehow slated to last five full years, may well reclaim the title. He's one of the top five most-streamed artists ever on Spotify, a statistic that doesn't even include his "hobby," all the hits he's written for other artists, from Justin Bieber to BTS.

But Sheeran is convinced that, in certain quarters, his achievements and talents — his elastic voice, his endless trove of hooks, his freaky, human-playlist capacity for cross-genre metamorphosis, lately extended to Afropop, EDM, and reggaeton — don't seem to register. In those eyes, he's a ginger-haired interloper, a vaguely hobbit-y mortal who ascended into the realm of pop godhood via some kind of cosmic error, and then refused to leave. "I was the butt of jokes before this," he says, "and I'm the butt of jokes now, and it's not necessarily just my music."

It's a mid-February afternoon, late summer in this hemisphere. Sheeran's wife of four years, Cherry Seaborn, and their two daughters — Lyra, who's two, and Jupiter, eight months old — are inside the house, square in the middle of an upscale suburban block. The whole family is spending a couple of months in New Zealand and Australia while Sheeran commutes to his stadium shows. There's an eerie normality to his offstage existence here, as if he's swapped lives with a prosperous Kiwi dentist. "Yesterday," Sheeran says, "we cooked, we watched an episode of *The Simpsons*, went to bed."

Lyra, who's emerged for some snuggle time, is eyeing a blue plastic wading pool on the Shire-green lawn. "As soon as Daddy's finished the interview, I'll go splashing with you," Sheeran promises.

Sheeran has zero traces of impostor syndrome. He looks at the dozens of songs he's discarded for every hit, the hundreds of shows he played before anyone knew his name, and is sure he knows how it all happened. But, he says, "people do look at me and they're like, 'How did you get in that position?'"

Again, he gets it. "I *am* a nerd," he says. "I love *Lord of the Rings*. I love Pokemon. I love fucking Lego and *Warhammer*, and yeah, I'm not meant to be considered cool." But he's long since ascended to an elite level of geekery. When he was very young, he admits, he saw Pikachu et al. as his "friends"; now he's the guy who gets asked to write a song (the Coldplay-ish anthem "Celestial") for a new Pokemon game. He once assembled both a Lego Death Star and a Millennium Falcon with a 1D-era Harry Styles, cameoed in 2019's *The Rise of Skywalker*, and has been pals with *Lord of the Rings*

R1374_FEA_Ed Sheeran [PR]_1305231;44_View-revoked_P.indd 44 13/04/23 10:43 PM

auteur Peter Jackson since writing a song for 2013's *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*. The other week, in Wellington, he watched *North by Northwest* in Jackson's home screening room, with fellow New Zealand resident James Cameron and family also in attendance.

With Sheeran's new album, – (pronounced *Subtract*), due May 5, he's in sudden danger of achieving a new brand of musical coolness, thanks to some of his most unadorned and emotive songwriting, paired with the chiaroscuro inventiveness of production by the National's Aaron Dessner. Sheeran knows there's a chance critics might actually like this one, which kind of scares him: "I'm worried about that, because all my biggest records, they hate."

He's sitting cross-legged and shoeless on the gray cushion of an outdoor couch, wearing a crisp white T-shirt, black shorts from the Italian brand Stone Island, and white tube socks. His arms are a rainbow riot of tattoos, quotes in Gaelic and Dwarvish among them. He's got a scruffy, reddish beard going, and his longish hair sticks out of a baseball cap from Lowden Guitars, a high-end acoustic-guitar manufacturer. When he was a kid, he dreamed of playing one; now he's a collaborator on a signature model.

Sheeran's hero and friend Eric Clapton got him into serious watch collecting, as he did for John Mayer, and today's wristwear is a Patek Philippe Perpetual Calendar model that seems to be worth at least six figures. (Don't bother trying to get his take on Clapton's anti-vax turn, by the way: "I love Eric. I don't want to say anything bad about him," says Sheeran, who started playing guitar after seeing a "Layla" performance on TV. He is, himself, vaccinated, but has managed to contract Covid at least seven times, thanks to constant travel and the kids.)

In keeping with the album's themes, Sheeran has "super-heavy" stuff — death, illness, grief, depression, addiction — to talk about this week, in the most extensive interviews he's done in at least five years. He'll end up revealing it all, maybe more than he planned, but he's wary of the world's reactions. First of all, he imagines people seeing it through the highly unsympathetic lens of "Rich Pop Star Feels Sad." And then there's the fact of the particular pop star he is. In his mind, he admits, "there is a lot of, like, 'Why do people care whether I feel this way or that way?'"

Sheeran encounters hostility almost exclusively online these days, when it reaches him at all. But when he first started coming into London as a teenager, toting his acoustic guitar and loop pedal from gig to gig, trying to get signed, he'd hear it right to his face. "I spent so long with people laughing about me making music," he says. "Everyone saw me as a joke, and no one thought I could do it." The way he sees it, he alchemized all that contempt and doubt into artistic fuel. "And I think that's still the drive. There's still this need to prove myself. And I'm still kind of not taken seriously. If you were to speak to any sort of muso, 'Oh, I love my left-of-center music,' I'm the punchline to what bad pop music is."

At some point long ago, he decided not to worry about it. "I mean, mate, when I wrote 'Perfect' and 'Thinking Out Loud,' I remember being like, 'Oh, these are a bit cheesy,'" he

R1374_FEA_Ed Sheeran [PR]_1305231;44_View-revoked_P.indd 45 13/04/23 10:43 PM

says. "But at the time being like, 'I don't know if I care.' And they became the biggest ballads in the world that year. And you're like, 'Well, people must connect with cheese, then!' " Sheeran isn't afraid to say what he means in his songs, at nearly all times. If he's grown up and is a father now, he sings, "I have grown up/I am a father now" — the opening line of 2021's =. His use of metaphor is sparing. He loves Van Morrison, but if Sheeran wrote a song called "Listen to the Lion," it would probably be about a trip to the zoo, and a Top Five worldwide hit to boot.

Someone on Twitter recently accused Sheeran of making "sex anthems for boring people," a critique he needs only a millisecond to contemplate. "*150 million* boring people, by the way," he shoots back, referring, loosely, to his total album sales, a figure that clearly hovers close to the surface of his mind. "I think I'm quite meme-able. Have you seen the meme of me when I'm queuing up at a record store in my own T-shirt with a bag that says "÷" on it? And it says, 'Why does Ed Sheeran look like he's queuing up to meet Ed Sheeran?' I think it's because I am quite quote-unquote 'ordinary-looking.' I look like someone's older brother's mate that has come back from college and works in a pizza shop."

In truth, at this moment, with his 32nd birthday about to hit, he looks less ordinary than ever. The beard lends him a certain glamour, and he's lean enough these days to expose sharp cheekbones he credits to an hour of weightlifting a day, pointing to a set of dumbbells on the porch. There's a river's worth of feeling in his deep-blue eyes, recently lasered out of nearsightedness, a striking contrast to all that red fuzz. "Babies love Ed, because he's got an unusual face," says Seaborn. She exudes warmth, intelligence, and ponytailed sportiness, and also happens to be the subject of a worshipful song — "Shape of You" — that's been streamed billions of times. (She'll tell some of her story in May 3's documentary series, *Ed Sheeran: The Sum of It All,* streaming on Disney+.)

"Sheeran is well aware that, to a certain kind of listener, "I'm the punchline to what bad pop music is."

For what it's worth, and it's worth a lot, Sheeran's friend and collaborator Taylor Swift thinks Sheeran is thoroughly great, "the James Taylor to my Carole King," as she told Rolling Stone a few years back. She hooked him up with Dessner, her *Folklore* and *Evermore* partner, to work on the Swift-Sheeran co-write "Run," for her Taylor's Version remake of *Red,* before suggesting they work on Sheeran's music. Dessner finds it "boring" to contemplate the idea that Sheeran or his music might be uncool. "He's a brilliant writer," he says. "I've seen it up close."

Sheeran wouldn't mind making new fans with *Subtract,* but he doesn't need your grudging acceptance. "Someone who's never liked my music ever? And sees me as the punchline to a joke? For him to suddenly be like, 'Oh, you're not as shit as I thought you were?' That doesn't mean anything."

Ed

Sheeran is crying again, and he's glad. It's nearly been a year, and he doesn't want the pain to fade quite yet. "I don't want to get over it," he says. "I would hate to talk about it, but not feel ..." His eyes and his face are equally red now, and he can't quite get the words out.

On Feb. 20 of last year, Jamal Edwards, one of the U.K.'s most prominent young music entrepreneurs, died suddenly at age 31, of a cardiac arrhythmia brought on by cocaine use. He was Sheeran's best friend, and the artist believes he owes Edwards his career, thanks to cred-establishing appearances on his influential YouTube channel SBTV when he was struggling for industry attention. Edwards' final Instagram post was a tribute to his old friend. "Happy Birthday to the OG, Ed. Blessed to have you in my life brother. You know you've been mates a long time when you lose count on the years! Keep smashing it & inspiring us all G!"

The two friends had an easy chemistry that you can hear in an old YouTube clip where Sheeran trades lines from the grime track "Burst Da Pipe" with Edwards, who's holding the camera, both of them cracking up. "People assumed that we were lovers," Sheeran rapped on a recent tribute to his friend, "F64." "But we're brothers in arms." "That was a big rumor in the industry," Sheeran says. "And I don't think anyone thought that I knew the rumor. But I get it, man. I lived in his room!"

When he was 18 and had no place to live in London, he crashed for the night at Edwards' house, and ended up staying for "God knows how long. Like, I get why people would think that. We used to go on holidays together." The night before he learned of Edwards' death, Sheeran was out to dinner with Swift and Joe Alwyn, exchanging texts with Edwards about plans to shoot a video the next day. "Twelve hours later," Sheeran says, "he was dead."

February of last year was already the worst month of Sheeran's life. Just before Edwards' death, Seaborn, six months pregnant, was diagnosed with a tumor that needed surgery — which couldn't happen until after she gave birth. There was talk of delivering early, though she ultimately carried Jupiter to term and had successful surgery in June, the morning of a Wembley concert for Sheeran. "There's nothing you can do about it," he says. "You feel so powerless." Meanwhile, he was in court defending a plagiarism lawsuit over "Shape of You," "being called a thief and a liar." (He won the suit.)

Edwards' death shattered him, sent him spiraling. "My best friend died," he says, tearing up for the first time in our discussions.

R1374_FEA_Ed Sheeran [PR]_1305231;44_View-revoked_P.indd 46 13/04/23 10:43 PM

OPENING SPREAD: SWEATER BY SAINT LAURENT, AVAILABLE AT BERGDORF GOODMAN. T-SHIRT BY PRADA. JEANS BY STONE ISLAND. RING: SHEERAN'S OWN.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: COAT BY TOM FORD, AVAILABLE AT BERGDORF GOODMAN. SHIRT BY PRADA. BRACELET BY WILD FAWN. SNEAKERS BY NIKE. PANTS BY RICK OWENS, AVAILABLE AT TWO MINDS. RING AND BRACELET: SHEERAN'S OWN.

THIS SPREAD: SWEATSHIRT BY SAINT LAURENT. T-SHIRT BY PRADA. BRACELET BY WILD FAWN. RING: SHEERAN'S OWN.

Ed Sheeran

"And he shouldn't have done." He found himself in his latest bout of what he quietly knew to be depression. "I've always had real lows in my life," he says. "But it wasn't really till last year that I actually addressed it."

He first experienced it in elementary school, a period that's sometimes played for laughs in chronicles of his life, but turns out to have been deeply traumatizing. "I went to a really, really sport-orientated primary school," he says. "I had bright red hair, big blue glasses, a stutter. I couldn't play the sport because I had a perforated eardrum. You're just singled out for being different at that point. I've kind of blocked out a lot of it, but I have a real hang up about that. I think it plays into wanting to be on a stage and have people like you and stuff."

In the wake of Edwards' death — and then, on top of everything else, the passing of another friend, Australian cricket star Shane Warne, in early March — Sheeran started experiencing a feeling he'd silently suffered through before. "I felt like I didn't want to live anymore," he says, his voice steady. "And I have had that throughout my life.... You're under the waves drowning. You're just sort of in this thing. And you can't get out of it." Those thoughts were bad enough, but shame arrived as their companion. They seemed "selfish," he says, "especially as a father. I feel really embarrassed about it."

It was Seaborn who figured out what was going on, and told Sheeran he needed help. For the first time in his life, he started seeing a therapist. "No one really talks about their feelings where I come from," he says. "People think it's weird getting a therapist in England.... I think it's very helpful to be able to speak with someone and just vent and not feel guilty about venting. Obviously, like, I've lived a very privileged life. So my friends would always look at me like, 'Oh, it's not that bad.'"

Therapy has been deeply helpful, but not magical. "The help isn't a button that is pressed, where you're automatically OK," he says. "It is something that will always be there and just has to be managed."

As he talks, Sheeran keeps pulling at a loose silver chain on his right wrist. He spent most of last year wearing two rubber bracelets. One was from Edwards' funeral, the other, bearing the slogan "Don't fuck up," from yet another lost friend, the Australian music exec Michael Gudinski, who died in 2021. On Christmas, Seaborn gave Sheeran the new jewelry, with Jupiter's and Lyra's names engraved inside. On New Year's Day, Sheeran made the switch. "It felt symbolic," he says, "to take off those bracelets and put on one for my family."

"I don't know any old rockers who aren't alcoholics or sober," Sheeran says. "And I didn't want to be either."

Sheeran's other form of therapy was his usual one: writing songs. Since 2011, Sheeran has been executing his plan for a cycle of albums with titles based on mathematical symbols, and *Subtract*, now the last of those five releases, was always in the mix. The idea was a stripped-down singer-songwriter album, returning him to his earliest roots, and he'd spent more than a decade on it, "sculpting this perfect thing." By early last year, it was ready to go. But the version of *Subtract* he's putting out in May isn't that album at all.

In late 2021, Swift's matchmaking led to Sheeran and Dessner sitting down for a sushi dinner in New York. Dessner recalls telling Sheeran that he "would love to hear him in a more vulnerable, more sort of elemental way." Not long after that conversation, Dessner did his thing, sending Sheeran fully arranged instrumental beds that just needed vocal melodies and lyrics.

In the midst of Sheeran's month from hell, he started writing over the tracks. "I wasn't really around a guitar," he says. "But I had these instrumentals, and I would write to them — in the backs of cars or planes or whatever. And then it got done. And that was the record. It was all very, very, very fast."

Sheeran, like much of humankind, is a huge fan of Swift's Dessner-produced *Folklore* and *Evermore*. While he was determined not to copy them, he does think Dessner helped him and Swift tap into the same mode of free, fast-flowing writing. Usually, Sheeran sits in a room with collaborators, bouncing ideas back and forth. In contrast, Dessner delivers a finished musical landscape. "And then he goes, 'Now you say what you want to say,'" Sheeran says. "So there's no filter. There wasn't any going back and checking on any lyrics. And I think that's what was brilliant about *Folklore* and *Evermore* — it's just complete brain-to-page. That's where you get lines like 'When I felt like I was an old cardigan under someone's bed, you put me on and said I was your favorite.' There wasn't anyone challenging that line. And that's why it's brilliant."

The opening track, "Boat," evokes one of Sheeran's early heroes, the singer-songwriter Damien Rice, in its starkness, with Dessner's textured chords swelling beneath acoustic strumming. (Sheeran wrote it over a piano-and-drums bed created by Dessner, but reworked it as a raw guitar song.) "They say that all scars heal, but I know maybe I won't," Sheeran sings, sounding more plaintive than you've ever heard him. "The waves won't break my boat." On another ballad, "Life Goes On," Sheeran sings directly of Edwards: "Life goes on with you gone, I suppose/I sink like a stone."

The lovely midtempo track "Dusty," propelled by ticking synthetic hi-hats, is lighter, capturing an epiphany Sheeran had during a morning ritual of listening to vinyl with Lyra — in this case, Dusty Springfield's *Dusty in Memphis*. "I'm going through that time of turbulence and massive lows," Sheeran says, "but then waking up in the morning and having a joyous morning with a beautiful girl. It's such a weird juxtaposition to go to bed crying and wake up smiling with your daughter."

"Eyes Closed," the first single, is built around a pinging pizzicato riff that builds

PRODUCED BY HEATHER ROBBINS AND MARY GOUGHNOUR AT CLM. PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTION BY EMMA REEVES. FASHION DIRECTION BY ALEX BADIA. MARKET EDITOR: EMILY MERCER. FASHION MARKET ASSISTANCE BY ARI STARK. STYLING AND GROOMING BY LIBERTY SHAW AND HILARY OWEN. TAILORING BY ALBERTO RIVERA AT LARS NORD STUDIO. SET DESIGN BY BETTE ADAMS AT MHS ARTISTS. DIGITAL TECHNICIAN: GREIGH LYNDON. PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANCE BY KATE KEITH AND ANNIE GREENNON. SET DESIGN ASSISTANCE BY KAETEN BONLI AND BELL FRANCIS-BELL. PHOTOGRAPHED AT PIER 59 STUDIOS.

R1374_FEA_Ed Sheeran [PR]_1305231;44_View-revoked_P.indd 48 13/04/23 10:43 PM

SUNGLASSES BY GUCCI. SWEATER BY THE ELDER STATESMAN, AVAILABLE AT TWO MINDS. RING: SHEERAN'S OWN.

to an octave-jumping chorus as big as anything in Sheeran's catalog: "I'm dancing with my eyes closed/'Cause everywhere I look I still see you." It's a rewrite of a more straightforward pop song Sheeran had on hand, a more generic breakup narrative. Now it speaks directly to his traumas and their aftermath: "I pictured this month a little bit different/No one is ever ready."

There are 14 tracks on –, but that's not the end of Sheeran and Dessner's collaboration. Sheeran yanked three tracks from the album that felt too joyous, and realized they were the start of something else. "It was very quickly seen that we were making two different things," says Sheeran. He went on to write an entirely separate second album with Dessner. He's already mixing that one, though he's not sure when it will come out; he wants to give – a chance to breathe. "I have no goals for the record," he says. "I just want to put it out."

Sheeran has five more albums in mind using another category of symbols, one he's not ready to share, at least on the record. He sees the last in that series as a years-long project, with a twist. "I want to slowly make this album that is quote-unquote 'perfect' for the rest of my life, adding songs here and there," he says. "And just have it in my will that after I die, it comes out."

Here

is what Ed Sheeran does before he goes onstage in front of 50,000 people: practically nothing. He switches from his usual T-shirt and shorts and watch and sneakers into a modestly sharper stage outfit, and heads out, without so much as a final glance in the mirror or a comb through his hair. No vocal warmup, even. He wakes up on show days feeling no different than on any other days, and talks to the vast crowds the same way he speaks offstage. His persona is no persona. (As for the infamous photo of a glammed-up Beyoncé duetting with a dressed-down Ed: "I think it symbolizes two people being themselves, personally. She is the best performer on Earth. And I am a bloke in a T-shirt.")

At 5 p.m. the day after our first meeting, just three hours before showtime at Auckland's Eden Park stadium, Sheeran is back at the house, with the kids eating dinner at a circular table. "Me and Cherry were talking earlier about how it's so lovely," Sheeran says. "We had an entire day. We did nothing but this. It's so nice and wholesome having family on tour. On the last tour, I'd party till 7 a.m., sleep till 4 p.m., get up and do the gig. But I was like, 26. It's very different."

The SUV ride to tonight's venue is only 20 minutes, during which we pass dozens of Sheeran's fans making the same journey on foot. We happen to hear "Love Yourself," the smash he gave to Justin Bieber, on the radio — the recording, he notes, is just his version with Bieber's voice replacing his own. We pass several barricades and are whisked inside. Sheeran's dressing room is a big, airy refuge, set off by white curtains, with a cream-colored couch at its center, and an elaborate play area in one corner, just in case the kids show up. A foil-covered dinner of Japanese noodles and vegetables arrives for Sheeran, and as with every meal he eats in our time together, he's arranged for me to be served the same — not a move that would occur to most celebrities.

There's a wireless sound system in a road case in the corner, and Sheeran uses some idle time before his show to play me some unreleased music. Like, a dizzying, unbelievable amount of unreleased music, in so many styles it almost feels like a prank. "I've got loads and loads and loads of shit," he says. Instead of waiting for inspiration, his method is to just keep the faucet flowing. "I wrote 25 songs the week I wrote 'Shape of You,'" he says. But he's never had so much finished music piled up that he's this excited about. It's years' worth of releases, in his estimation. "Who's to say at what point creativity stops," he says, "and you can't write any more songs? At least there's enough banked up."

He starts out by playing an airy ballad, "Magical," from his second album with Dessner. "This is how it feels to be in love," he sings. "This is magical." Another Dessner song, a likely single, has a bright "Solsbury Hill" feel: "Saturday night is giving me a reason to rely on a strobe light," he sings, amid more meditations on grief. A third Dessner production is a surging Bruce Springsteen-inspired track called "England."

There is, as it turns out, yet another completed album waiting in the wings, a collaboration with reggaeton superstar J Balvin. They knocked the whole thing out last year, after Sheeran randomly encountered Balvin (José, he calls him) in a hotel gym a couple of years earlier. The album is all ready to go, complete with already-shot videos, but again, with no release date in sight. He plays a track that bridges Afropop and reggaeton, joined by Burna Boy and Balvin. Another Balvin-produced track is a collaboration with Daddy Yankee, with Sheeran singing a hook between rapped verses; yet another is a slower reggaeton song where Sheeran actually raps in Spanish. "I wrote it in English," he says, "and they translated it in the studio." There are collaborations with Pharrell Williams and Shakira as well — turns out Sheeran has been writing for her next album, too.

Sheeran plays a grime track where he full-on speed-raps, trading off with the British rapper Devlin, another friend of Edwards. "Like Kendrick Lamar, this shit ain't free," Sheeran raps. There's a drum-and-bass banger "for the ravers" that he wants to release as a double A side with a David Guetta-produced track where Sheeran praises "summer vibration." Another Guetta song is even more shameless in its Vegas-EDM feel, but it's not for Sheeran — they're trying to figure out who'll sing it.

There's a striking doo-wop-meets-Paul McCartney song called "Amazing Daughter," the first thing Sheeran wrote after he briefly persuaded himself he should retire from music to become a stay-at-home after Lyra's birth. It's an outtake from his last album that he loves, but has no idea where he'll find a place for it.

He plays a remnant from time spent in Nashville, a nearly parodic bro-country song he wrote with Florida Georgia Line that Sheeran assumes they rejected as too-on-the-nose: "My neck's still red, the sky's still blue, my truck's still big, my girl's still you ... we live where we live because we love living in Middle America."

Then there's a collaboration with Benny Blanco, and, oh, yeah, a lighters-up power ballad duet between Sheeran and Bieber, which Sheeran worked on with superproducer Andrew Watt, slated for Bieber's next album.

On top of it all, there's the big-ass song Sheeran wrote for the series finale of *Ted Lasso*, airing in the spring. "Do you want to hear it?" he asks. "Because it's fucking good." "We'll rise from the ashes and write in stars with our names," he sings in a chorus Chris Martin will envy, complete with *whoa-whoa-whoas*.

"Sorry," Sheeran says at the end, unnecessarily. "I know I've just, like, song-vomited on you."

Snow Patrol guitarist Johnny McDaid, one of Sheeran's most frequent collaborators, has long since gotten used to Sheeran's genre hopping. "A songwriter is sort of an antenna," he says. "They pick things up in the ether, and depending on how wide the frequency band of your antenna is, you tend to genre-fy yourself. With Ed, his frequency band is so wide that it really can come from anywhere and be anything."

It's nearly showtime, and Sheeran strips from today's outfit (nearly the same as yesterday's, with the exception of rare Marty McFly-model Nikes) to his black boxer briefs, and pops on his stage clothes. He has a secret method of transport through the crowd that he asks me not to reveal. Once that mystery journey is over, we're underneath his yacht-size rotating stage, currently covered by a sort of metal cage that will rise to reveal Sheeran after a countdown on the video screens.

R1374_FEA_Ed Sheeran [PR]_1305231;44_View-revoked_P.indd 50 13/04/23 10:43 PM

There's about three minutes left, and Sheeran is still uncannily calm, promising a sound guy (known as Normal Dave, in contrast to another Dave in his employ) a celebratory drink soon. As the countdown hits 90 seconds, Sheeran insists that I scamper up to the stage itself, to the spot by his mic stand, and take it in. The vast crowd is visible through the enclosure, all around you. You're facing them alone, with just your loop pedal and guitar. There doesn't seem to be much to be calm about.

"Forty seconds!" a stage manager warns, and I vacate the stage, with Sheeran taking over. The concert proceeds as planned, with singalongs and phones held aloft during the slow songs and Sheeran explaining how his loop pedal works, as he has every night for years. (These days, a full band, kept to side stages, does join him for a few songs.) Then he gets to "Bloodstream," a moody 2014 confessional about an MDMA experience. The stadium glows blood-red as he builds the loop that drives the song — a bassy thump on the guitar, a driving arpeggio. But three minutes in, a rising tide of static overtakes the music. Sheeran stops and disappears under the stage. He reemerges and starts again. A minute in, the static returns. He repeats the process. More static, another disappearance. Sheeran's production team is starting to sweat.

Finally, Sheeran informs the crowd that the noise is coming from his loop pedal, which won't be working for the rest of the concert. He finishes the show by playing seven songs, several of them not on the set list, all just voice and guitar, unadorned. He's forced to rework his hits in strummy coffeehouse arrangements, rendering the pyro effects during "Bad Habits" slightly comical. The fireworks bursting from the stage at the very end of the concert are so incongruous that Sheeran can't help laughing.

For the crowd, the whole thing is a revelation, and you'll hear people in Auckland talking about it on the street for days afterward. How many other artists of Sheeran's or younger generations could pull this off?

Backstage, Sheeran is in a mild state of shock. "Yeah, fuck me," he says, sighing. He can't bring himself to perceive the evening as the triumph it is; all he sees is a crowd that didn't get its money's worth.

He makes it clear his team needs to fix the problem, but there's never a question of a tantrum, onstage or off. "What can you gain shouting at people?" he asks. "I also think people work harder for you. If someone's shouting, you're just like, 'Fuck you.'"

We were supposed to do another interview tonight, but Sheeran bumps it until tomorrow, a decision he says he made onstage. Instead, he eats a steak (again, I get one too), and starts seriously drinking red wine. Some of the old schoolmates who now work for him fill the room, and pour themselves glasses. The lights dim, and any remaining tension eases. "Let's just forget tonight," Sheeran says, raising a glass. "Let's just forget it ever happened."

But he doesn't forget. And he doesn't get much sleep, either. One of his kids has tonsillitis, so he's up most of the night, and when he wakes up, his first thought is of the previous night's troubles. "It was a good outcome," he acknowledges, "but it's just not what people paid for. It'd be like going to watch *Avatar,* and it stops halfway through. Then James Cameron comes out at the end and just narrates it. You'd be like, 'Oh, that's a new experience!' But it's not what you paid for."

When we meet again in the same backstage area the next day, he's got on the same shorts and a pastel hoodie, and his energy is a little edgier than usual. His crew spent long hours pinpointing the source of that show-stopping static: Turns out subwoofer vibrations damaged a chip in the loop pedal's digital brain, and they're ordering backups.

We sit on the dressing-room couch and start talking about "Bad Habits," his 2021 smash. He's mentioned in the past that the song is about "addiction issues," but it never seems to register with anyone. "If you sing that on a piano really slowly," he says, "it's like a confessional song about addiction."

Earlier, he told me he "used to be a party boy in my twenties." But it went further than that. "I was always a drinker," he says. "I didn't touch any sort of like, drug, until I was 24." But beyond weed, he did get into a "few" substances, which he won't name, because he doesn't want his kids reading it someday.

He's vague on how and when he broke from those substances, but makes it clear the hardest thing was quitting hard liquor. "Two months before Lyra was born, Cherry said, 'If my waters break, do you really want someone else to drive me to the hospital?" he recalls. "Because I was just drinking a lot. And that's when it clicked. I was like, 'No, actually, I really don't.' And I don't ever want to be pissed holding my kid. Ever, ever. Having a couple of beers is one thing. But having a bottle of vodka is another thing. It's just a realization of, 'I'm getting into my thirties. Grow up! You've partied, you've had this experience. Be happy with that and just be done.' I love red wine, and I love beer. I don't know any old rockers that aren't alcoholics or sober, and I didn't want to be either."

Edwards' cocaine-related death only cemented his feelings about certain substances. "I would never, ever, ever touch anything again, because that's how Jamal died. And that's just disrespectful to his memory to even, like, go near."

Quitting hard liquor helped him moderate his food intake, and his newish exercise habit has changed his body. But food, too, has been a struggle. "I'm self-conscious anyway, but you get into an industry where you're getting compared to every other pop star," he says. "I was in the One Direction wave, and I'm like, 'Well, why don't *I* have a six pack?' And I was like, 'Oh, because you love kebabs and drink beer.' Then you do songs with Justin Bieber and Shawn Mendes. All these people have fantastic figures. And I was always like, 'Well, why am I so ... fat?'"

He chuckles, with zero humor. "So I found myself doing what Elton [John] talks about in his book — gorging, and then it would come up again." (Elton John put it this way: "I had developed bulimia.") "There's certain things that, as a man talking about them, I feel mad uncomfortable. I know people are going to see it a type of way, but it's good to be honest about them. Because so many people do the same thing and hide it as well."

Again, all of these battles are continuous. "I have a real eating problem," he says. "I'm a real binge eater. I'm a binge-everything. But I'm now more of a binge exerciser, and a binge dad. And work, obviously."

It's almost showtime again, but Sheeran is happy to keep talking, with one half-joking request: "If I don't cry in the next 40 minutes, that would be great." This time, the show is flawless, and the hit singles at the end go off in their full, loop-pedal glory, the climactic fireworks fully earned. He makes a point of expressing his gratitude for his crew from the stage.

"Fuck me," he says backstage afterward, in an entirely different tone, a white towel around his neck. "Perfect show! That was so good. We should fuck up more often." He's thrilled, and so ready to celebrate that you'd almost think it was his first big concert.

Sheeran is "very grateful to do what he does," says McDaid, his songwriting partner. "A lot of people in his position aren't. He walks into a room to write a song, and tells me how grateful he is to be doing this."

Lately, he's found more elemental reasons to be thankful. Earlier in the week, he and Seaborn made the two-hour trip from Auckland to rural Waikato, where Hobbiton — the Shire sets built for *Lord of the Rings* — still stands, among the impossible verdant beauty of New Zealand's grasslands. A year after everything blew apart, the couple sat on a bench, sipped red wine, and watched the sun dip down, talking about their kids and their good fortune. "We're so grateful," Sheeran says, "to be alive." ®

R1374_FEA_Ed Sheeran [PR]_1305231;44_View-revoked_P.indd 51 13/04/23 10:43 PM

Paris Hilton Is *Almost Ready to Get Real

BY ALEX MORRIS

52

She created a character to leave childhood traumas behind. Now, she wants us to see her true self — mostly

RS

AMANDA CHARCHIAN

R1374_FEA_Paris_Hilton [PR]_1369858;30_View-revoked_P.indd 52 13/04/23 10:21 PM

PARIS
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
PARIS

THE CERULEAN SKY over Beverly Hills is silvering its way toward nightfall when I find myself trapped at Paris Hilton's. The photographer and crew have packed up and left with their sundry equipment. The stylists have packed up and left with countless lumpy bags and a large box they'd struggled to fit in their car. The landscapers have packed up and left in a white truck laden with an alarming amount of foliage. Even the helicopters overhead have stopped their mosquito whine. A hush has fallen over Hilton's stately driveway (where her pink Bentley sits with a flat tire) and over her Italianate mansion (where a neon-pink glow emanates from one entire wing). And here I am, shaking the curlicues of an elaborate wrought-iron gate that had been wide open earlier and wondering how the hell to get out of this gilded paradise.

It is, admittedly, not a bad place to be stuck, I think to myself as I wander the grounds looking for an alternate means of egress. There are palm trees of biblical proportions and a multitiered fountain. There are potted plants and cherubic statues. There is an entrance as imposing as the Vatican's, save for a neon-rainbow welcome mat and a grand, columned foyer in which stands a life-size, stuffed alpaca (a gift from the Kardashians, as it turns out). Down a soaring hallway, there is a well-appointed family room of sorts, if family rooms typically boasted neon signs of the Chanel logo and studded Versace pillows and a smudge stick resting on an ashtray emblazoned with the words "You're Fucking Awesome." And in that very room, just moments ago, there was Hilton herself, nestled into a corner of the creamy couch, cozy in a hot-pink tracksuit and rainbow socks, and talking about her newish husband and her new baby and her even newer book, *Paris: The Memoir,* which, she later tells me, she wrote because she "suppressed so much" and found that "opening up was just so healing." And because she knows what you might think when you hear the words "Paris Hilton," and, truth be told, she was "so over that narrative."

Plus, the narrative doesn't even track. Now she's a wife. Now she's a mom. Now, on this day in late February, she has a one-month-old baby boy, Phoenix Barron Hilton-Reum, who is not just named for a city, like his mother, but also for a mythical creature that rises from the ashes. Now, she and her husband, venture capitalist Carter Reum, have successfully pulled off one of the most impressive moves in the history of celebrity by keeping their baby's entire existence a secret until a full week after he was born. The Hiltons didn't even know. The Reums didn't even know. The only people who knew were the medical team and the surrogate, who watched episodes of *The Simple Life* while pregnant so that the fetus would get used to the sound of his mother's voice. Hilton had thrown on a brunette wig when they got the news that Phoenix was arriving a week and a half early, and the couple rushed to Cedars-Sinai hospital, where they cried as they witnessed their baby being born. He'd been so healthy, they'd taken him home that very night, dispensing with staff (save for a baby nurse) and hunkering down in their mansion in awe at what they'd accomplished. "It was just like, 'Oh, my God, I'm a mom,'" says Hilton. "My life has just been so public, my whole life has been, just, invaded; I felt like, for my baby, I just wanted him to come into the world and just be here and not have all this weird..." she trails off, not even sure how to articulate what "this" is, or the extent of its weirdness.

Then the moment gets meta: One of the most photographed women in the world — who in fact had just come from a photo shoot that was itself documented by a film crew for the second season of her reality show *Paris in Love* — begins scrolling through her phone for a picture of her own literal creation. She lands on the image, holding out the device to proudly show the tiny little features of a tiny little human under a tiny little hat. "This is when he was three hours old," she says. "He was so freaking cute. He came out camera-ready." She says this and then laughs at the ridiculousness of the statement, the Paris Hilton–ness of it. But then also: Look at him. He really did!

Reum, a boyish and buoyant Midwesterner in navy sweats, lopes into the room to check on his wife. "Oh, you got the preview!" he says to me excitedly when he sees the picture of Phoenix. Hardly anyone has yet seen the actual baby, though a few days ago at Hilton's birthday party — a small gathering that included Sia, Rebel Wilson, and Hilton's sister, Nicky — some friends had crept upstairs to take a peek.

"He's very intuitive," says Hilton of her baby.

"Very attentive," says Reum, beaming.

"So chill. Does not cry."

"The doctor said all this stuff. He's like, 'Your baby is very smart.'" Reum raises an eyebrow. "I was like, 'I don't know if you can tell that.'"

"But I really think he is!"

"I believe he might be as well."

"Just the way he's always focusing," Hilton says. "His eyes are just always focused on me."

"I had just been so abused that I didn't even know who I was anymore," she tells me. "I just was like, 'Who am I? And what is life?'"

There was a point in time, of course, when the same could be said for basically the entire world, when the great-granddaughter of the guy who founded the Hilton hotel chain was so hounded by paparazzi that she heard the clicks of cameras when they weren't even there. In both 2006 and 2008, she was the most Googled person on the planet, a slinky celebutante who'd grown up between Bel Air and New York's Waldorf Astoria, who'd been kicked out of multiple tony private schools, and whose bicoastal command of the party scene was front-page news.

Even back then, though, Paris Hilton was telling us that she was not "Paris Hilton." The high-low look, the knock-kneed pose, the baby voice — it was clear she was playing into a cartoon fantasy. But somehow, the idea of Hilton as more than a ditzy Day-Glo Barbie never quite took, even as she built

HAIR BY EDUARDO PONCE. MAKEUP BY STEVEN TABIMBA. STYLING BY SAMMY K FOR THE ONLY AGENCY. PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANCE BY BYRON NICKLEBERRY AND DOM ELLIS. STYLING ASSISTANCE BY MARISSA PELLY, KIONA VICKROY, AND REBECCA MIKELSTEIN.

R1374_FEA_Paris_Hilton [PR]_1369858;30_View-revoked_P.indd 54 13/04/23 10:21 PM

PREVIOUS SPREAD: DRESS BY MONOT. EARRINGS BY NOUVEL HERITAGE. **THIS PAGE:** DRESS BY VALENTINO. EARRINGS BY F+H STUDIOS. RINGS BY MELINDA MARIA.

a multibillion-dollar beauty-and-fashion empire, became the earliest of adopters to any potentially fortune-making development in tech (crypto, NFTs, AI, the metaverse), and transitioned from being paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to show up at a party to being the person who *brought* the party as a DJ commanding upward of a million dollars per show.

It wasn't until the release of her 2020 documentary, *This Is Paris,* that a revisionist version of Hilton began to emerge, coinciding with a moment in which most people with vaginas and many without were experiencing a collective reckoning of the supremely dickish way Y2K society had treated young, female celebrities (see also: Spears, Britney; Lohan, Lindsay). For the first time, publicly or privately, Hilton spoke out about spending almost two years at a series of troubled-teen "treatment centers" and about how the experience had left her traumatized and hollowed. "I had just been so abused that I didn't even know who I was anymore," she tells me. "I just was like, 'Who am I? And what is life?'" Under those circumstances, why not take on whatever persona that particular era had wanted to project on her?

The revelations in *This Is Paris* transformed "Paris Hilton" (object) into Paris Hilton (subject). And like any good innovator, Hilton has spent the past few years iterating on these developments. She's repeatedly shown up in Washington, D.C., to advocate for laws regulating the interventions that can be used at behavioral-therapy "schools." She's admitted, as she does to me, that "before, my life was this superficial thing that I really wasn't inside." She's explained that speaking her truth changed that and primed her to find a relationship built on full disclosure. And she's broadcast all this in *Paris in Love,* a Peacock series that followed Hilton down the aisle in Season One and that she maintains is almost entirely unscripted. In other words, she has used her burgeoning authenticity to expand her brand and also, somehow, her actual life and family.

Paris: The Memoir digs further into the details, outlining the abuse Hilton suffered between the ages of 16 and 18 at four for-profit "children's torture camps," as she calls them, where parents sent their supposedly wayward offspring (at 16, Hilton was already making the most of Manhattan nightlife). There, she tells me, staff would "get off on being able to abuse children" and "break us down" in ways so damaging that "no one believes the kids because it sounds insane when you say it out loud." She writes of being strangled, beaten, and starved; being stripped and put into solitary confinement; being awakened in the night and taken to a room where she was strapped down and given a "gynecological exam" as heckling staff looked on; being forced to take mystery pills that made her loopy; being kept inside one building for 11 months straight; being told that she was unloved and unlovable; and being aware that one means of escape would be to die. "I didn't try," she says, alluding to suicide. "I was just, in my mind, like, 'I would rather be dead than be here.' It was that brutal."

The memoir also reveals how Hilton was groomed by an eighth-grade teacher and roofied and raped by a guy she met at the mall at age 15 ("He clamped down on my face and whispered: 'It's a dream. It's a dream. You're dreaming'"). It shares how she locked herself in a bathroom stall to escape the advances of Harvey Weinstein at 19. It sketches out the details of the abortion she had at 22. It discusses how she considered herself asexual during a time when she may have been the most sexualized woman on the planet ("I feared sex. I hated the idea of sex. I avoided sex until it was absolutely unavoidable"), how she equated abuse with love ("For a long time, I thought that if someone got so jealous they threw a phone

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at your head or grabbed you and shook you till your neck bones rattled — well, that must mean they *reeeeeeally* loved you, right?"), and how she coped with all of this by drinking herself silly and keeping herself so busy that there was never any time to think. Naturally, mistakes were made during this time. It's no secret that she said some racist and classist and homophobic and bratty things, that she landed herself in jail and sometimes seemed to be simply imploding. She has couched that behavior, in retrospect and in past interviews, as a response to trauma. Today, as we discuss those days, she points out, "Back then no one was talking about mental health. Except for people [being] like, 'Oh, you're mental.'"

The backstory is so much to take in that by the time we're sitting in Hilton's living room, one is inclined to grant her the fairy-tale ending she seems to have been able to conjure, and that is even announced by the words on the neon sign in one corner: "Happily Ever After." The bubble is only slightly burst when someone enters the room to remind Hilton that she has some *Today* show something-or-other call to make. "Everyone just tells me what I'm doing every day," Hilton says, shrugging.

As Reum walks me out, he urges me to pet the stuffed alpaca, which he calls a "stress animal." "Give it a proper hug," he advises. So I do. I don't know if it's real or not, but it doesn't matter. It feels amazing.

The next day, I meet Hilton in a cork-wrapped room at the studio where she is recording the audio version of *Paris: The Memoir.* The book is explicitly structured to mimic Hilton's ADHD, allowing anecdotes about skydiving or camping out in Ibiza or partying with her famous friends to pop up and provide comic or other relief. Still, reading it out loud day after day has been … a lot, even for the engineers recording it. "I was like, 'Sorry guys. It's kind of a crazy story,'" she says, laughing. "And they're like, 'Yeah, when we heard we were doing a Paris Hilton book, this is definitely not what we were expecting.'"

In a lot of ways, Hilton is not quite what one would expect either, especially not today, in a black tracksuit and baseball cap, with an unmade face and her hair stuffed haphazardly through a rubber band at the nape of her long neck. Again, she's in sock feet, which she draws up under her on a small sofa in one corner of the darkened studio ("I feel like a smurf," she says of the moody blue lighting). Most striking is the lack of any sort of overt performance of femininity; she projects a physical stillness that makes me aware of my own performance of gender — the way I move my hands, how my voice rises when I laugh. In the book, she writes about coming to the realization that she is a performance artist, and that her body is her medium. For years, there was a safety to the performance, she tells me: "It was like, 'I'm acting, and they can talk and make fun of that character or do whatever. It's not me. It's me, playing something else.' I think it didn't hurt me as much," she says of society's approbation. "Because I was like, 'Honey, I'm laughing all the way to the bank. Come on.'"

The first time Hilton told anyone — and this includes her family — about what had happened to her at the youth treatment centers, she was on camera for *This Is Paris,* bleary-eyed with jet lag, unable to sleep, and surprised with the words that were coming out of her mouth as director Alexandra Dean sat on her hotel bed with a handheld camera. She immediately told Dean that what she'd said could not be in the film. "But the next day she came to me with all this research showing me that hundreds of thousands of kids are being sent to these places every year. And my mind was blown. I'm like, 'I can't believe this is still happening two decades later.'" She realized that speaking up could possibly stop it from happening in the future.

And it has. Hilton's advocacy has since changed the laws in five states. Plus, she says, as counterintuitive as it may be, there are personal advantages to working out one's trauma in public, with a camera rolling. "They were just such hard subjects to talk about in the beginning that it kind of made it more comfortable that other people were there, maybe," she says. Speaking with her family about what she'd been through, as she does throughout *Paris in Love,* she'd been able to frame the conversations as a choice by producers. "It's kind of like, 'They told me to ask you — it's not me,'" she says of raising the topics. She pulls her hair out of the rubber band and then hastily ties it back again. "The only therapy that I've had," she says, "is literally this book and the movie."

But here's the thing: It's worked. As bad as things were in the past, she wants me to understand that so many parts of her life are so beautiful now in the present. Tonight she'll go home and lie with Phoenix on her chest and just look at him looking at her. She'll have a bubble bath with Reum. In the morning, perhaps they'll walk their dogs around their beautiful grounds and ride their electric bikes around their beautiful gated community. She can still go out and about with a little subterfuge ("I like going to the Melrose Flea Market in disguise and buying all these random things"). Just a few nights ago, she had dinner with Nicole Richie ("like, a double date, which is fun; we live two minutes away"). And — imagine! — she recently skipped out on DJ'ing for President Biden and other heads of state to attend Britney Spears' wedding ("she's already been through so much, so I only like to talk about happy things with her, fun things, clothes and music and puppies"). She's working on her deepfake and on her virtual reality Paris World with the goal, she tells me, of extending her likeness into the metaverse "so I can be at home and a mom but still do [things]." (She just completed the first-ever fragrance signing in the metaverse; a million people attended.) She's releasing her 30th perfume and working on a new album, combing through the 200 songs that have been sent to her from friends like Miley Cyrus and Meghan Trainor. After hearing Justin Bieber's "Lonely," she DM'd Benny Blanco to say how much she related to it and what a dream it would be to make music with him, so now — guess what? — she is. This, in other words, is the life of a real person, having a real and amazing human experience that's only gotten more real and amazing the more she's packaged its reality for us.

Take, for instance, how she introduced her mom to Phoenix, inviting Kathy Hilton over as if it were any regular day, then presenting her with both a blue Chanel bag — "I was like, if I give her Chanel first, maybe she won't be so upset that I didn't tell her about this" — and with the grandson who, until that moment, Kathy had no idea existed. "I was holding the baby on my shoulder with a blanket over him, and then I just sat down. She's like, 'What is that?' And I was like, 'A baby … meet your grandson.' She's like, 'Is this yours?' And she starts crying. She's like, 'Let me hold him. He's the most beautiful baby I've ever seen in my life. Oh, he's so beautiful.' She was just in tears."

It was such a real moment, full of real emotion. And, amazingly, all this realness — in a twist that would feel surreal to 99.999999 percent of people on Earth — was captured by the cameras of *Paris in Love.*

Before I leave the studio, I tell Hilton about getting trapped on her grounds — wandering around her estate like some wayward member of the Bling Ring until an assistant helped me find the button to push that would let me out. I tell her that it made me wonder if she also sometimes felt trapped, pinned between a person and a persona, between a public life and a private one, constantly teasing out where an experience should be filed. But she wants me to know that it's not like that, not exactly, not anymore. She feels vindicated now; she feels purpose. She finally has control over her own narrative, and she means that literally. "I'm the producer of the show," she says. "We have editing approval." If she lives in a construct — and who doesn't? — it's now one of her own making. To think of her as trapped would be to filter her life through my reality, not hers, and to rob Paris Hilton of her agency. "Now people finally are understanding me, and I just have this respect in a way that I've never felt before," she says. This is real to her. And it feels amazing.

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Q&A

Chuck D

Rap's foundational firebrand on his new PBS docuseries, the new hip-hop acts he respects, and the future of AI in music

By MANKAPRR CONTEH

Chuck D is humble about his contributions to *Fight the Power: How Hip Hop Changed the World* — the expansive, four-part PBS and BBC series where he joins other hip-hop icons, from Melle Mel to Eminem, as well as executives, journalists, and academics, in unspooling rap's history as a social movement. "My work is as an initiator and giving the platform," says the Public Enemy MC, who executive-produced the project. "I know how to cut, edit, and design audio, but when it comes to film and TV ..." Still, his voice and perspective are unmistakable as *Fight the Power* explores the symbiotic relationship between rap and sociopolitical struggles over the past 50 years. He was even more hands-on in crafting his new coffee-table book of fine art, *Livin' Loud*. "You make art for nobody but yourself," Chuck says. "The arts have set me free."

Where did *Fight the Power* start for you?

A lot of things in the narrative about hip-hop [have] usually been covered from adolescents' perspective, and I always railed against that. I first got involved in hip-hop at [about] 27, so it was always a grown-folks dialogue to me. I wasn't a kid, and I wasn't speaking to kids. It's music for past, present, and future; for ages as young as single digits up to 70 years old. I'm a big Ken Burns fan. So I was like, "Why couldn't hip-hop follow in the same form?"

You like to emphasize that hip-hop is a global phenomenon. Is that why it was important to you to partner with the BBC?

I've been to 116 countries, and to me, hip-hop is more about the world than about one little place in the United States. People in the United States seem to overblow themselves out of proportion. Hip-hop is more embracing the collective of what we are. The thing about culture, it brings human beings together. It knocks the differences to the side.

In some circles, there is a notion that political rap is no longer prevalent. How do you feel about that?

You can't waste time with people that don't get it. You got to make them go, "Oh, I get it now." But you don't cater to them. You went to college, or whatever?

Mm-hmm.

Did they care about teaching in a way that a fourth grader could understand? No. You were a student in college, and they were teaching you at that level. That's how it got to be in a lot of areas of the arts.

Another perspective is that political rap is everywhere, because of the people who predominantly make hip-hop, because of the conditions in which hip-hop artists live—

I used to have a simple saying when they used to say N.W.A was street and KRS-One is political. I said, "Well, political is knowing who runs the streets."

Are there artists or scenes in hip-hop today that you find inspiring?

You go to Rapstation.com, on my radio network. Nobody is better than us.

Looking at the artists in your Top 20 over there, it's very different from what, say, *Billboard*'s Top 20 is for rap, right?

Yeah, nobody's thorough like us. It's almost like when you watch basketball. Everybody's on a high school or college level — we're the NBA.

So is there not a more mainstream act that inspires you?

No, I mean, listen, you might have a semi-OG who's just moved into OG rank, somebody like a J. Cole. You might get great new music, like when 21 Savage and Nas got together, they just did a track. Now, when things start getting into a little bit of craziness, like a cat want to go at somebody, or drill rap ... that's when it turns into something else.

Drill is such a huge phenomenon in rap right now.

I think it's big in some places; it's big with some ages. Is it all around the world?

Ghana has asakaa, which is its version of drill. Kenya has its version of drill. The U.K., of course, has its own version of drill. I talked to an Italian white guy who made drill once. So there is a global presence.

Well, drill is bringing the collective back in a way. One of the worst things to ever happen to hip-hop is they got rid of the groups. In the Nineties, they promoted the individual, because it was easy for the recording contracts. But drill has been like, "I can't rap, but I'm part of the crew." It's bringing the posse back. Now, I'm not going to get into the texture of what they're saying. That's an angle that needs to be answered socially. Drill has evolved out of young people not getting answers for their questions.

You were about 25 when you first started Public Enemy. What advice would you give a 25-year-old rapper now?

Don't do it alone. Collectives win. Strength is [in] the numbers.... In the arts you can make an individual painting — it still takes a team to get your art across to other people, if you're interested in that. Social media's been perfect, 'cause if I do a piece of art, then immediately I got people coming to it. It's cool to have friends with a screen in between, but post-pandemic, we have to work out ways of being able to see humans eye to eye. If you don't have certain understandings of what is what, you'll be tricked and fooled with new realms of AI. Artificial intelligence ain't going to ever get dumber.

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Smokey Robinson

On meeting MLK, missing old friends, and why he'll never retire

Why did you call your new album *Gasms*?
When you say "gasms," most people think about orgasms. But any good feeling that you get is gasm. It's probably a controversial title, but I wanted it to be that way.

What music still moves you the most?
I listen to everything. I heard a great dose of music growing up. I heard everything from classical, like Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin, to gospel, jazz, and blues.

The Motown legend's new album, 'Gasms,' is out April 28.

So many Motown greats are no longer with us, and most of them were your good friends. How do you get over losses like that?
Because you have to, man. We have the Motown Museum in Detroit. When I go back there, man, I walk through the building and I look at those pictures. Eighty percent of those people are gone. We grew up together. We were all brothers and sisters. We hung out at Hitsville, man. We had picnics, went to each other's homes, we bowled and played chess and checkers and ping-pong and ball and football. And to see those people passing on ... it's always a rough emotion.

What are the secrets of living a long life?
There's no secret. If there was a secret to longevity, man, you can believe somebody would've bottled it by now and made a fortune.

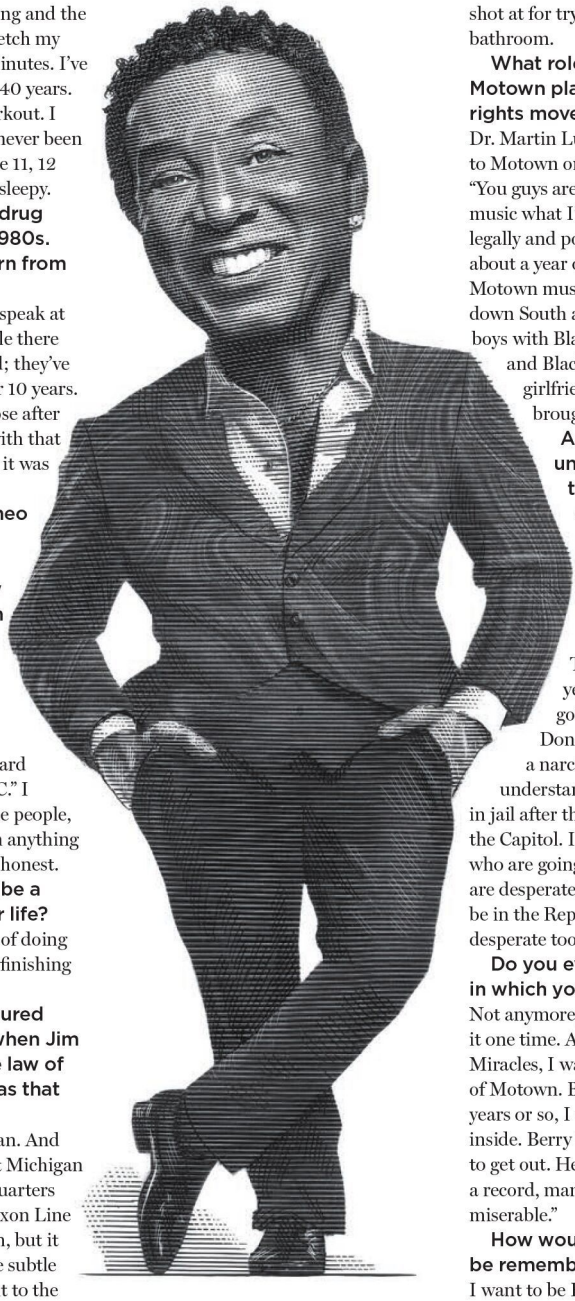
I'm sure your fitness routine helps. Tell me about it.
I get up every morning and the first thing I do is stretch my body for about 45 minutes. I've been doing yoga for 40 years. And then, I do a workout. I try to eat right. I've never been a party person. Come 11, 12 o'clock at night, I'm sleepy.

You dealt with drug addiction in the 1980s. What did you learn from that?
Not to do it again. I speak at rehabs and see people there who are 20 years old; they've been doing drugs for 10 years. I was a walking corpse after two years messing with that cocaine. Thank God it was before crack.

You shot a Cameo video where you mispronounced "Chanukah." How did you feel when it went viral?
I didn't feel anything, man. I've been hearing about "Hanukkah" all my life. But I'd never heard of it spelled with a "C." I got ridiculed by some people, but that didn't mean anything because I was being honest.

Will there ever be a biopic about your life?
We're in the process of doing that now. We're just finishing up the script.

The Miracles toured the Deep South when Jim Crow was still the law of the land. What was that like for you?
I grew up in Michigan. And I've come to find out Michigan was the main headquarters above the Mason-Dixon Line for the Ku Klux Klan, but it was just a little more subtle there. When we went to the South, it was much more blatant. You can't even go to the bathroom. We've been shot at for trying to go to the bathroom.



What role do you think Motown played in the civil rights movement?
Dr. Martin Luther King came to Motown one time. He said, "You guys are doing with music what I'm trying to do legally and politically." After about a year or so of making Motown music, we would go down South and see white boys with Black girlfriends and Black boys with white girlfriends. The music brought them together.

Are you able to understand how the country that elected Barack Obama twice voted Donald Trump into office?
I've known Trump for 30 years. I've played golf with him. Donald Trump is a narcissist. I don't understand why he's not in jail after the insurrection at the Capitol. I think the people who are going to vote for him are desperate. The powers that be in the Republican Party are desperate too.

Do you ever see the day in which you retire?
Not anymore, man. I tried it one time. After I left the Miracles, I was vice president of Motown. But after three years or so, I was so miserable inside. Berry Gordy told me to get out. He said, "Go make a record, man, because you're miserable."

How would you like to be remembered?
I want to be Beethoven. I want to be Chopin. I want them to be playing my music 500 years from now. ANDY GREENE

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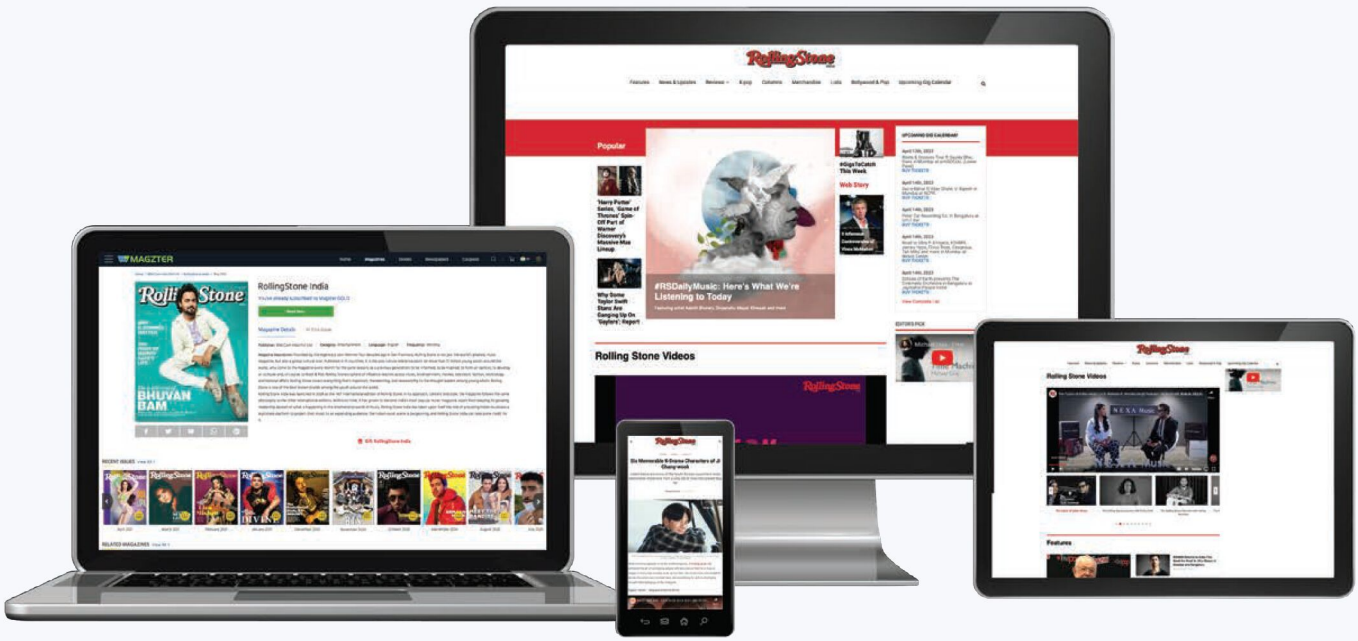

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